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By George R. Sims



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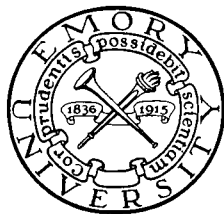
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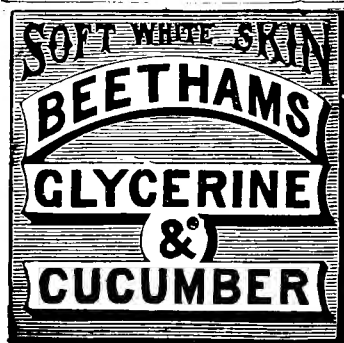


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# MY TWO WIVES

*AND OTHER STORIES*

BY

GEORGE R. SIMS

AUTHOR OF

'MARY JANE'S MEMOIRS,' 'HOW THE POOR LIVE,' 'THE DAGONET RECITER,'  
ETC.



London

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1894



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# MY TWO WIVES

## CHAPTER I.

My father's name was William Smith.

I have reason to believe that he was proud of the name, for when I was born he insisted, it seems, upon perpetuating it, and accordingly it was settled that I was to be christened William.

My mother—she told me the story herself years afterwards—strongly objected. She declared that she had great faith in me from the first. The doctor said I had a good head, and my dear mother, who was very romantic, made up her mind that I was going to be a great man. Now, William Smith is not an easy name to render famous. There are so many William Smiths that the celebrated one would want to go about labelled in order to distinguish him from the others.

After a deal of argument and not a few tears,

she succeeded in so far turning my father from his original purpose as to allow me to have a second name, and that second name she finally decided should be Hengist.

William Hengist Smith *might* be somebody, and so William Hengist Smith I was duly christened.

My father died when I was seventeen. Up to that age I had enjoyed all the advantages of being the son of a prosperous City merchant. I was about to go to Oxford, when the death of my father altered all my mother's plans for my future.

We had been living in a fools' paradise. My father had speculated rashly and was on the verge of ruin. It was a knowledge of his terrible position which caused his fatal illness.

After the estate had been wound up it was discovered that we were almost penniless.

My mother's friends came to her assistance; but they were not rich, and it was necessary that I should at once begin to earn my own living.

I was what is known as 'a smart fellow,' and I wrote a capital hand—in fact, my penmanship was my strong point. I could do almost anything with a pen in my schoolboy days. I used frequently to

amuse myself by imitating the handwriting of my schoolfellows and of the masters. I did this so successfully that it was often very difficult to detect the forgery.

The masters who were made aware of my accomplishment, and to whom specimens of my skill were occasionally shown, would shake their heads and say it was a dangerous gift.

Of course I laughed. As if it were likely that I should ever do anything wrong !

Alas ! those who called my gift a fatal one were right after all. I owe to it the great misfortune of my life.

To pass from prosperity to comparative poverty is to most of us a great trial. The men and women who can shrug their shoulders and take a reverse of fortune with a smile are very few in number.

I accepted the position my poverty forced upon me, but I loathed it. I longed for the old days of comfort and luxury, when almost everything I fancied was within my reach. But I did very well as a clerk, and being quick at figures as well as a splendid penman, I soon began to rise in the office.

When I was two-and-twenty I had £200 a year.



But what was that to a young man of extravagant habits, who had quite as much allowed him when he was seventeen, and had looked forward to a splendid income and a life of pleasure?

My mother's health about this time began to decline, and she was ordered to live in the country. I could not accompany her, as I should have had to sacrifice my position in the City, so I had to look about for a new home, and at last I decided to go to a boarding-house. It would be cheaper for me as a bachelor than lodgings, and I should have some society and a certain amount of comfort.

I selected a boarding-house in Bloomsbury, and I soon began to be quite at home in it. My fellow-boarders were two German clerks, a French gentleman who described himself as an agent, a middle-aged scientific author who spent most of his time at the British Museum, two old ladies—one the widow of a colonel (so she said), and the other an old maid who had been governess to a German Princess and was never tired of talking of the distinguished society in which she had moved—and a young lady, very charming, very pretty and very self-possessed, who was supposed to be staying at the boarding-house

because all her relatives lived abroad, and she had law business in London.

This young lady was a Miss Ellis, and as we were the youngest members of the happy family we soon became friendly.

After dinner we generally found ourselves together in the drawing-room, and when Miss Ellis obliged the company with a little music I usually went to the piano and turned over the leaves of the music for her.

From being friendly we became confidential. I imparted to Miss Ellis the story of my reverse of fortune, and she confided in me the fact that her business in London was connected with a disputed will.

A relative of hers, an old gentleman, had died and left her the sum of £50,000. The family disputed the will on the ground that while nursing him during his last illness she had exercised undue influence. They further contended that he was not of sound mind at the time he made the bequest.

She told me a long story to explain how it was her relatives were so bitter against her, and I, believing her, gave her my fullest sympathy.

The law is proverbially slow, and Miss Ellis, who had to collect evidence, found it necessary to remain a long time in town.

So it came about that we were for nearly six months at the Bloomsbury boarding-house seeing each other daily.

If I were to say that during this time I fell in love with Miss Ellis I should be saying that which is not strictly true.

But she had a certain fascination for me; and when I remembered that she would probably be worth £50,000, I at last began to think that if I ever intended to marry this would be by no means a bad investment.

The young lady was not slow to see that she had made an impression on me. She became more confidential than ever.

One Sunday afternoon, when we were alone in the drawing-room, she asked my advice.

It seems that she had found a letter among her papers from her dead relative. It was strong evidence in her case, and to her horror she discovered that he had omitted to sign it. It had been written to her by an amanuensis employed by her relative,

and she supposed that it had been placed before him to sign, and accidentally put in the envelope and posted without the signature.

She showed me the letter. It certainly was important, but valueless unsigned. I was very sorry for her.

‘And to think,’ she cried, with tears in her eyes, ‘that through this accident I may lose £50,000!’

I said it was very terrible. She showed me then all the documents in her care. There was no doubt she was entitled to the money. It was only the selfish people who wanted everything for themselves who were endeavouring to deprive her of her rights.

One thing led to another, and then she told me how deeply grateful she was for my friendship; that when she left the boarding-house she should feel she had lost a dear friend.

The daylight faded, the glow of the fire alone lit up the room. It was very quiet, very romantic, that still Sunday afternoon in the cosy drawing-room, and somehow or other I yielded to the influence of the scene, and laid my hand and heart at the feet of that pretty and persecuted young lady, the prospective possessor of £50,000.



She said it was very sudden—she hadn't thought of it in that light—would I give her the night to think over the position?

Of course I could only consent.

But the next day she came to me and put the affair on quite a business footing.

'Yes ; if I would help her to get her £50,000, she would be my wife.'

Of course I replied that I would sacrifice my whole life to advance her welfare and her happiness.

She didn't want me to sacrifice anything ; she only wanted me—and, oh, she put it so innocently and so prettily—she only wanted me to sign her dead relative's name to that unfortunate letter.

I did it.

I was a fool—a madman—a rascal, but I did it. I did it that night up in my own room with a copy of the old gentleman's signature in front of me. I did it skilfully and cleverly, and I showed it to her with a certain amount of pride.

She said it was wonderful. I had mixed my ink splendidly, and had made the signature look as old as the body of the letter.

She took it from me, and all that night I never

closed my eyes. The moment I was quiet and by myself I saw the folly, the wickedness, the criminality, of my act.

In the morning I managed to get a few words with her alone. I begged her to give me the letter back.

She laughed at me—not mockingly, but in a nice, innocent girlish way. How silly I was! She didn't intend to use the letter. She wouldn't think of such a thing. Only I had told her how clever I was at imitating handwriting, and she thought she would try me.

I accepted the explanation, but I should have been a great deal happier if she had given me the letter back.

Still, I comforted myself with this thought: if the trial did come on, I would tell her that if she attempted to put that letter in evidence I would go to the other side, declare that I had done it as an experiment, and clear myself of any complicity in a criminal offence.

That idea eased my mind, and I let matters go on and we continued our courtship.

About a fortnight afterwards Miss Ellis appeared at dinner quite radiant. She informed the company

that her case was settled without coming into court. The opposition to the will had been withdrawn, and a compromise had been effected. She was to take £30,000, and the other relatives were to take £20,000. She had been magnanimous.

Everybody congratulated her, and I was one of the first.

That evening we had a little whispered conversation, and Miss Ellis—Marion I called her now—led me to understand that as her case was settled she wanted to leave London, and so we might as well be married.

The proposition for a hasty marriage coming from Marion rather startled me. She had not up to the present betrayed any romantic symptoms, and, after all, our courtship had not been a long one.

I had a vague idea that it would be better for us to know a little more of each other before we took this irrevocable step, but Marion had an answer for every argument I put forward.

She answered me that though she had borne up through the long worry and anxiety, now that the matter was settled she was beginning to feel the reaction, and it was absolutely necessary for her to

have a change. She told me that she didn't care to go away and leave me at the boarding-house, and she confessed that she was anxious not to lose my society.

The man who can resist a woman's arguments is not an everyday man, and I, alas! was only a very commonplace specimen of male humanity. So I consented, and it was arranged that I should take the necessary preliminary steps.

I went to the registrar's office armed with the information Marion was good enough to give me with regard to herself, and gave the usual notices and filled up the usual paper.

I didn't like the look of that registry office at all. It was dreadfully cold and cheerless and prosaic, and there wasn't an atom of romance about the deputy-registrar.

The registrar's clerk was good enough to inquire if I should bring my own witnesses, and when I said I didn't think so, he explained that the article was always kept on the premises.

I thanked him, and asked him to arrange with the witnesses retained on the establishment to be present, and then I returned and informed Marion that all

was in order, and that at the expiration of the time required by the law, all we had to do was to attend at the office and get the business through.

Three weeks afterwards we left the boarding-house one after the other.

I left first, and waited at the corner of the street till Marion joined me.

No one had the faintest suspicion that two of the boarders had just gone out to get married.

The registry office was some little distance, and as we walked along our conversation was anything but romantic.

Do what I would, I couldn't help feeling that I was taking a false step, and yet I had not the courage to retreat.

When we came to the door of the office, I felt inclined to take to my heels and run away, but mastering this feeling of cowardice, I followed the lady in.

Marion was remarkably cool and collected for a young and blushing bride. She answered the few questions put to her in a firm voice, and when the ceremony—process would be a better word—was over we both signed our names, and the witnesses—one

was the clerk, and the other was the charwoman who swept up the registrar's office—signed theirs, and we were man and wife.

I gave the witnesses five shillings each, and, offering Marion my arm, led her out into the street again.

It had begun to rain, and so I opened my umbrella, but the rain increased to such an extent that we had to stand up in a doorway and wait till the shower had passed.

Standing in that doorway, with the wind beating in our faces, I felt a little quaking at the heart. It seemed a bad beginning. It wasn't the sort of wedding morning that I had pictured in the days when I used to dream of being the proud possessor of a pretty wife.

I had a wife, and she had £30,000; but I couldn't for the life of me get up a bridegroom's smile or whisper loving words into my bride's ear.

As soon as the shower had passed we hurried back to the boarding-house, packed up our belongings, and that afternoon we went away in separate cabs and met at Victoria, and went to Brighton for our honeymoon, leaving everybody in sublime ignorance of what had happened. Marion had desired a secret

marriage, and I was not in a position to alter her determination.

It was not a happy marriage. Little defects of character in my wife attracted my attention which I had not noticed before. I found that she was not truthful, and certainly not scrupulous. And she had a hard, cold way with her that disagreeably surprised me.

I had not looked for romance in my wife, but I had expected a certain amount of sympathy, and what, for lack of a better expression, I will call good-fellowship.

Marion, however, took no pains to deceive me as to her real character. I made a violent effort to conceal my own disappointment, and to assume the character of a devoted husband, but she repelled my advances, not actively, but passively.

When I tried to talk about our plans for the future she would turn the subject, and we had not been married two days before she let me see very plainly who was going to be master.

I began to feel supremely uncomfortable, and I made up my mind that nothing but disaster could follow such a marriage.

I went out by myself and walked about by the sea, cursing myself for my folly, and longing for some sympathetic ear into which I could pour my woes. I never felt more lonely in the whole course of my life than I did in the first few days of my honeymoon.

I knew that a crisis must come sooner or later. I had a strong foreboding of evil, and my worst fears were soon realized.

One day she left a letter on the table of our sitting-room. It was lying open, and I read it, and I learned something which astonished me. The compromise had been agreed to by the relatives in consequence of a letter having been submitted to them, a letter the testator had written to Miss Ellis, and which she had only recently found. *It was the letter which I had signed.*

I taxed my wife with the deception she had practised on me. I was furious, but she only laughed. I swore that I would make a clean breast of it.

Still she laughed.

‘Nonsense!’ she said, ‘*you* committed the forgery, not I. And you are my husband. A husband cannot give evidence against his wife.’



I was thunderstruck. She had married me to close my mouth.

‘Still,’ I cried, ‘I can go to the lawyers on the other side. They will be able then to take some action.’

Still she laughed.

‘You’ll find yourself in a very awkward position, if you do,’ she said.

I began to think the matter over. I saw she was right. I certainly should have some difficulty in making people believe that I forged the signature and married her directly she got the money without being in any way a party to the plot.

But I felt that I had been duped—made a cat’s-paw. Then my long pent-up anger broke forth, and in a torrent of words I told the lady what I thought of her conduct.

She listened to me with a contemptuous smile on her cruel thin lips.

When I had exhausted myself she had her say.

Speaking calmly and deliberately, she informed me that she was by no means sorry I had discovered the truth. It would save any further deception on her part, and perhaps it was as well that we thoroughly understood each other.

She had no desire to claim my society any longer. In fact, she very much preferred to be her own mistress. No good would ever come of 'scenes,' and as we were not likely to become more friendly as time passed on, the best thing I could do was to go home again and leave her to manage her own affairs.

I quite agreed with her that henceforward there could be no common life for us, and that evening I packed my portmanteau and took my departure, and so ended my honeymoon.

I had asked for a week's holiday, and so I went back to my berth in the City, and left my wife and her £30,000 for good and all.

I was determined to be so far clear as this—that if anything ever did come to light it should be proved that I had no share of the spoil—that directly I found out the truth I left the woman undisputed mistress of her fortune and continued to earn my own living.

I saw my wife once after that. She wrote me to meet her in London. I kept the appointment, and she proposed a compact. No one knew of our marriage. She would not bear my name, and she would leave me free from all responsibility on her behalf.

I was quite agreeable, and so it was settled. But she insisted on a proper deed of separation in which I agreed not to molest her. I accepted the condition, we went to a solicitor's, the deed was drawn up and signed, and we parted outside the office. From that moment I believe she went back into the world under her maiden name, and I—well, I grew mad with myself. I grew careless, reckless, despondent, and I took to drink.

I didn't take to it all at once. I began, as many men do when sorrow and trouble come upon them, to hate being alone at night; and so, when the day's work was done, instead of going home I loafed about the streets, and went into bar parlours and drank, not for drinking's sake, but to still the gnawing pain at my heart.

From taking a little now and then, I grew to take a good deal often. I acquired the taste for drink. The drink habit grew on me, and fastened its fatal coils about me. I tried at first to resist it, but the resistance was a feeble one, and after the first struggle I gave myself up body and soul to the great curse.

I didn't wait till evening now to dull my brain with alcohol. I drank spirits morning, noon and night.

Whenever I could slip out of the office for a few minutes I went off and 'had a drink.'

It had become a necessity with me now. I had to drink to enable me to do my work, and then I did the work badly.

A year after my marriage I was dismissed from my situation, and I thought a change would do me good.

I felt it was my one chance of shaking off the fatal habit which was breaking down my health and ruining me body and soul. With a desperate effort I managed, after a time, to wean myself from drink. I tried several times, but broke down, but at last I succeeded. Then I said to myself that I would see the world. My mother had just died, and the little capital that came to her from the wreck of my father's business was mine. It was only a few hundred pounds, but it was enough to take me to Australia, and so to Australia I went.

The only person to whom I communicated my address when I settled down in the Colonies was the solicitor who had drawn up our deed of separation. I thought it as well to let somebody know it in case of accidents.

I obtained a situation over there in the name of

William Smith. I dropped the Hengist, because in Australia it was in the way, and I didn't want it. After I had been there about two years, I fell madly in love with a young lady, the daughter of the people who kept the house where I lodged. Then I began to feel the bitterness of my position. My love was returned. Then I did another mad, wicked thing. I never intended to go back to England again. My wife and I were separated for ever—dead to each other. She had taken her maiden name again, and so I married—married my sweet little Cora, and lived with her, as happy as the conscience I could not entirely stifle would allow me to be.

It is difficult for a man who has not been placed in my position to understand how I could bring myself to act as I did.

To understand it you must take into consideration all the circumstances, and remember that I had never had any love for the woman who had marred my life by making me her dupe. I had never known one moment of the happiness of married life with her, and I rebelled against the idea of growing old, robbed by her trickery of the solace of a loving woman's companionship.

My position was a desperate one—the step I took to remedy it was a desperate one. But I persuaded myself that I was another man, that the husband of Marion Ellis had disappeared from the world, and that the husband of Cora Williamson had nothing in common with him. And persuading myself thus, I refused any longer to be miserable, and determined to make the best of my life and let my terrible secret die if need be with me.

After my marriage I settled down, and my good star seemed to be in the ascendant. With a little capital Cora's father lent me I went into business, speculated and prospered, and at the end of another two years I was fairly well off.

We had a sweet little home, and I was supremely happy. Cora was a devoted wife, and from the first hour of our marriage we never had an angry word.

Sometimes in the silence of the night I would wake up and think of the other woman and the other life. But I never let the thought linger. I drove it away, and at last brought myself almost to believe that the past was a dream—a nightmare—a something which was only the creation of my own imagination.

The good luck which had set in after my marriage with Cora continued, and at last a big, successful *coup* made me the possessor of what might without exaggeration be called a fortune. At any rate, I was placed beyond the necessity of work, and had leisure to enjoy life and to devote myself to my wife's society and my own amusement.

Then there came upon me an intense longing to go over to England for awhile—to see the old country once again. My wife was very anxious to go. It had been the dream of her life to see Europe.

Where was the danger? I was only Mr. William Smith. Mr. and Mrs. Smith could stay at any hotel without attracting attention to their names, and the other woman was hardly likely to meet us, or even to know of Cora's existence. We were separated. She was Miss Ellis, a spinster, and, if the worst came to the worst, she couldn't betray me without the story of why I left her coming out, and that might be awkward for the £30,000.

She would have to account for her taking her maiden name. She would have to inflict such an injury upon me by taking proceedings that she would be sure that I should not spare her in return.

She had told me at the time we separated that all she desired was to be left free. Was she likely, even if by a remote chance she learned of my marriage, to sacrifice her freedom and proclaim herself my wife?

She had never loved me—there could be no jealousy. She had everything to gain by holding her tongue, everything to lose by making me her enemy. Again my fatal habit of arranging matters to suit my own views came into play. I convinced myself that there was no earthly chance of Marion crossing my path or assuming a hostile attitude.

And so at last we sailed for England. In London we went to the Langham Hotel. I showed my wife all the sights of the great city, and she was delighted.

One day I thought I should like to show her my mother's grave; so I took her to Highgate, where we had buried my mother beside my father, in the family grave he had purchased years before the crash came.

I had some difficulty in finding the tomb, so I left my wife on the gravel path while I went wandering about.

I found it at last.

A feeling of sorrow came over me as I gazed on the



spot where my parents had lain in the grave side by side so long while I had been far away in a strange land beyond the seas.

The tears came into my eyes, and the mist before them prevented me seeing very clearly at first.

I saw my father's name, and immediately under it my mother's.

‘ Also of Jane,  
Wife of the above,  
Who entered into her rest  
August, 188—.’

Poor mother! I made up my mind to come again to the cemetery before I left, and lay a wreath of immortelles upon her tomb.

It would be at least a sign of my having remembered her when I was far away.

I was just turning away to go and bring my wife to the grave, when I saw that there was a further inscription underneath my mother's. I looked at it for a moment, then I started back with a wild cry of astonishment.

Did my eyes deceive? Was I the victim of some extraordinary illusion? No; there were the big black letters upon the marble slab before me.

‘ Also of  
William Hengist Smith,  
Son of the above,  
Who died September the —, 188—,  
Aged 24,  
And is here interred.’

Son of the above! I was their only son. My name was William Hengist Smith!

I was looking at my own tomb! I was dead and buried, and my body lay beneath that marble slab in Highgate Cemetery!

## CHAPTER II.

As soon as I had recovered from the shock which the sight of my own name upon our family grave at Highgate caused me, my first thought was for Cora.

She was waiting for me on the gravel path some little distance away. I determined to go to her at once and make some excuse for not showing her my mother’s grave.

My brain was in a whirl. Even after the first shock of horror and surprise had passed away I could hardly realize that I was not dreaming.

But there before me was the inscription. It could

not mean anyone else but myself. I was the only child of William and Jane Smith, and my name was William Hengist Smith.

At first I imagined that some story of my death had reached England, and someone had placed my name upon the tombstone as a memorial. But the words 'And is here interred' made that theory untenable. I was alive—alive and looking at the place where my lifeless body was supposed to be resting.

Someone, therefore, must have been buried who was supposed to be me.

But who had supposed such a thing? and who was the dead man who had my name upon his coffin-lid?

With my mind full of this strange and awful mystery, I mechanically made my way through the tombs until I came to the place where Cora, my wife, was patiently waiting for me.

'Well, have you found it, dear?' she said.

I had not been able to make up my mind what I should say to her. I was too confused, too excited, to invent a plausible story, and so I told a deliberate lie.

'No, my dear,' I said. 'I must have mistaken the

part of the ground. Let's go away now and come on a brighter day. The sight of all these tombs has upset and depressed me.'

I don't think in her heart of hearts Cora had ever relished the idea of a visit to the cemetery, and she very readily fell in with my views.

The drive back to the hotel was a long one, but I scarcely spoke a word. Cora saw that I was thoughtful and depressed. She fancied it was the cemetery which had upset me, and she tried to lead my thoughts to other subjects.

But all her efforts were in vain. I replied to her only in monosyllables. Do what I would, I could think but of one thing—the fact that I, William Hengist Smith, was buried in the family grave at Highgate.

The idea haunted me. We had arranged to go to the theatre that evening, and we went; but I saw and understood very little of the piece. I looked at the stage mechanically, but right through the painted scenery there rose up before me a monument to the dead, and upon it, in great black letters in bold relief, stood out the name of William Hengist Smith.

I slept very little that night. I lay with wide-

opened eyes, and let my mind grope blindly in the darkness for some clue to the great mystery.

I determined that at all risks and hazards I would investigate the matter. I absolutely declined to be buried alive.

On the following morning I told Cora that I had some important business which would take me to the City and detain me there for the greater part of the day, and I went to Somerset House in order to get a copy of my death certificate.

I filled in the form, paid the fee, and after a short time the book was brought to me. To describe my feelings as I saw my name among the registered deaths would be impossible. My blood ran cold, my knees trembled, I felt as if I should fall to the ground. But by a violent effort I pulled myself together, and read as in a dream the meagre details given.

I had been found drowned. A coroner's inquest had been held upon my body.

The certificate of my death, registered at Somerset House, had been received from the coroner, and I had been buried by his authority. That was all the information.

I procured a copy of the certificate, and thus armed with the dates I went out into the Strand, wondering what I had better do next.

I was determined to fathom the mystery and know the truth.

I wanted someone to help me, and yet I was afraid to trust anyone with my secret. I did not want to identify myself too closely with the deceased gentleman. I was naturally nervous, seeing that I was staying in London with a lady whom I had married.

According to the certificate I had been dead about six years. It was four years ago since I married Cora. At the time of my marriage, therefore, I had been dead two years.

Horrible as the whole business was, I could hardly repress a smile when I thought of the extraordinary complication in which I found myself involved.

One thing was certain. I could walk about now without fear and hold my head high. Nobody could punish me for bigamy, because I was dead before I contracted the second marriage—dead and buried.

Still, I felt far from comfortable. I remembered that inscription on the grave at Highgate. I felt that there was an intruder in the tomb of my ancestors,

that an impostor was lying under false colours by the side of my father and mother.

The first thing I had to find out was under what circumstances my body had been identified. To do that I should have to make inquiries; to find an account of the inquest, perhaps to make inquiries at the coroner's office or of the police.

I didn't relish doing that myself. I had a strange fear that I might in some way or other betray myself, or be accidentally recognised. I should have to give my name and address—to furnish proof, perhaps, of my right to investigate the matter—and this was exactly what I didn't want to do. I could hardly go to an office and say, 'I want to find out under what circumstances Mr. William Hengist Smith died and was buried, because I am Mr. William Hengist Smith.'

The man who has something to conceal is always loath to start inquiries concerning himself, and I had a good deal to conceal.

In this dilemma I determined to go to a professional inquiry agent—to tell him nothing about myself, but offer him a substantial sum for the information I required. He could make the inquiries, and that would save me going to an official source.

I went into a restaurant to get some lunch, and asked for a *Daily Telegraph*. I looked down the advertisements of the private detectives, and selected a firm whose offices were in the Strand. To them I went, and, giving no name, asked to see the principal.

I was ushered into a small room, and a tall, thin, middle-aged man rose, bowed to me, and motioned me to take a chair.

I stated the object of my visit in a few words.

I handed Mr. Dash the certificate of my death.

‘I want you to get me a full account of the inquest held on this gentleman if you can,’ I said; ‘it is a very simple matter, I expect, but I am leaving England in a day or two, and I want it at once.’

The agent looked at the certificate, and began to say that it would take a little time.

I stopped him.

I knew enough of these agencies to know that the longer a job takes the greater the profit, because the expenses and fees are run up, so I replied that I would give a lump sum, to be agreed upon, directly the information was in my possession.

Eventually Mr. Dash agreed that for the sum of



£25 he would get me full particulars in a couple of days.

He asked me my name and address. I told him that for private reasons I preferred not to give them, but that I would call personally and hand him the £25 in return for his written report.

‘Very good,’ he said, and, leaving the certificate with him, I took my departure.

As I went out of the room he touched a bell on the table.

I had to pass through the outer office. As I did so one of the clerks rose. I thought he was going to answer his employer’s bell, but he put on his hat and went down the stairs in front of me.

I at once jumped to the conclusion that the touching of the bell was a signal to the outer office that I was to be followed. I had declined to give my name, and the private inquiry agent was anxious to know it.

Once outside in the street I crossed the road and pretended to look in a shop window.

I wanted to see if the clerk was watching me. I gave a furtive glance to the left and to the right—he was nowhere to be seen.

Then I looked across the road and saw him calling to a paper-boy for a *Globe*.

He bought the paper and went back upstairs.

I had been over-suspicious. I was not to be followed, so I went straight back to my hotel.

Cora was very glad to see me. It was the first time since we arrived in London that I had left her for so long a time.

Now that I had put matters in train I felt a little relieved in my mind, so I determined to forget the mystery as much as possible and wait for the *dénouement*. Cora found me quite my old self that afternoon, and the next day, in order to distract my mind, I devoted to her and a round of sight-seeing.

On the morning after that, at twelve o'clock, I went to the office of Messrs. Dash and Co., and had to wait for some time, as Mr. Dash was engaged.

When I was shown in to him my first question was, 'Have you got the information?'

'Yes,' was the reply, and, unlocking a drawer in his writing-table, he took out a big envelope and handed it to me.

'You had better read it here,' he said. 'You may have some questions to ask me on it.'

I opened the envelope and read the following statement :

‘ On the 28th of September, 188—, the body of a well dressed gentleman, aged about 23, was found floating in the Thames near the Temple Stairs, by the River police. It was taken to the police-station and examined by a medical man. No marks of violence were found on the body, and no papers. In the waistcoat pocket were two sovereigns, and in the trousers pocket some loose silver. There were no initials on the clothes. A full description of the body and the clothing were given in the daily papers, and the police issued the usual notices. Several people came to see the body, but failed to identify it, until a Mr. Garstin, a merchant in the City, called one day and said that, the description answering that of a clerk lately in his employ, he would like to see the body. He said it was very like a clerk formerly in his service named William Hengist Smith, but he had not seen him for twelve months, and could not swear to the remains.

‘ This statement appeared in the papers, and the following day a lady called and stated that she was the wife of William Hengist Smith, but was separated

from him. He had inherited a small sum at his mother's death, which she believed he had spent in dissipation. He had often threatened to commit suicide. Confronted with the body, she at once identified it as that of her husband, and claimed it.

'At the coroner's inquest she gave evidence to this effect, and swore positively that it was her husband. Mr. Garstin also gave evidence that he was struck by the similarity, and thought there was no doubt it was his late clerk. The medical evidence went to show that there were no marks of violence, and eventually a verdict of "Found drowned" was returned. The widow claimed the body, and it was buried at Highgate.'

There were other details in the report, but they were not important. I had read sufficient to understand how it was I came to be buried with my father and mother.

For the first time a ray of light dawned upon me. But I could not understand why my wife—my legal wife, who had resumed her maiden name at our separation—had suddenly reassumed the status of a married woman in order to identify a drowned man as her husband.

As soon as I had read the report I folded it up and put it in my pocket. I then handed Mr. Dash £25 in bank-notes.

He gave me a receipt for the money. I took it and glanced at it mechanically, and then uttered an exclamation of astonishment. The receipt ran as follows :

‘Received of Mr. William Smith the sum of £25 for particulars of the death of, and the inquest held on, William Hengist Smith.’

‘How did you know my name?’ I exclaimed angrily, the hot blood rushing to my face.

The agent shrugged his shoulders.

‘I found it out,’ he said quietly; ‘we can never work well in the dark, you know.’

Then, noting my confusion, he smiled, and said :

‘There is no necessity for you to be alarmed. I always like to know the name of my clients. Once we start an inquiry, we often come upon information which may some day be of great value to them. If we didn’t know who they were, we couldn’t communicate with them.’

I accepted his explanation. It wouldn’t have done

for me to appear alarmed or seriously angry. That would perhaps have aroused the agent's suspicions.

I was about to leave, when the agent called me back.

'You are sure this is all the information you want?' he said.

'Quite sure, thank you.'

'I suppose the subsequent career of the widow of Mr. William Hengist Smith is of no interest to you.'

I hesitated.

'Well, I—er—I should like to know what had become of her.'

'I can tell you, but not, of course, for the £25. Thinking you might like the inquiry completed, I followed the case up, and I can tell you a little about the lady. Is it worth another £25?'

'Yes.'

'Very good!'

He unlocked his desk again, and took out a blue envelope and handed it to me.

I opened it and read the report:

'Marion Smith, widow of William Hengist Smith, was married at St. Mary's Church, Kensington, on —, 188—, to Sir Henry Lascelles, Bart. Sir

Henry and Lady Lascelles are now residing at Canning House, Kensington.'

My wife had married one month after my drowned body had been identified by her, and she was now Lady Lascelles.

I had not the £25 with me, so I told the agent I would go to my hotel and fetch it.

'There is no hurry,' he said. 'Any time that you are passing to-day or to-morrow will do, or you can send me a cheque.'

I folded the paper up, put it in my pocket, and went out into the street.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! My wife had buried me and had married another man. I felt convinced that it was to marry the other man she had buried me. She had seen the report of the finding of the body in the papers. The published statements of my former employer had put the idea into her head of playing a ghastly comedy and making herself safe in case I ever turned up and threatened proceedings. She knew that I had left the country. She knew that I was going to the colonies when we signed the deed of separation.

Still, I was dead. She had certainly killed me in a

very effective way, and I should have some trouble in proving that I was alive. And to do that would be to proclaim myself William Hengist Smith, the husband of Lady Lascelles. To do that would be to betray the woman I loved better than all else in the world, my dear Cora.

‘William Hengist Smith,’ I said to myself, as I walked back to my hotel, ‘you are dead—dead and buried. Your wife has made herself safe in contracting a second marriage, and she has made you safe at the same time. A dead man can’t commit bigamy.’

I was rather relieved for Cora’s sake that I was dead, but I didn’t like the idea of that unknown suicide lying in my family grave among my people and using my name on the tombstone.

But how was I to get him out? He was there, and there he would have to stop till the day of judgment.

Satisfied, at least, that I was now safe, and that my wife could never interfere with me again, I began to breathe more freely. I had no fear now of anybody, so I walked about London holding my head high, and I lost the terror which had once or twice come upon



me when I met women in the street who looked at the first glance something like my wife.

Relieved in my feelings, I determined to stay on through the London season instead of going abroad and returning from Venice to Australia.

One night at the opera we met an old friend of Cora's, a rich Australian lady, who had been in England some two years. She insisted that we should come and see her, and we went to dinner a few days afterwards. Then came an invitation to a ball, and for Cora's sake I accepted it.

It was a grand ball, and a great many tip-top people were there, for our Australian friend's husband was an important public personage.

We arrived early—too early, not being used to society ways—and so we saw nearly all the people arrive, and were able to learn who they were.

Cora was delighted. She danced several times, and everybody admired her. I didn't dance, but sat quietly in a corner and looked on.

An hour later, when I was watching the dancers, I heard someone say, 'That's Sir Henry Lascelles.'

'And is that dark woman his wife?'

'Yes,' was the reply; 'that is Lady Lascelles.'

Poor old chap ! I'm afraid he has anything but a good time.'

My cheeks went deadly white, and then flushed crimson.

Lady Lascelles !

I turned and found myself face to face with my first wife.

Our eyes met.

She knew me, I am certain of that ; but for all outward and visible signs I might been a total stranger, whose face her eyes had accidentally rested upon in the street.

I had not such complete command of myself.

I felt the hot blood rush to my cheeks and fade away again. My heart almost stood still, and a faint sick feeling crept over me.

Sir Henry Lascelles, her husband, a tall, military-looking old man, a faded dandy vainly endeavouring to appear a young buck, was standing near her.

While my eyes were still fixed upon her (I could not look away, though I tried), she turned to Sir Henry, and said in a voice loud enough for me to hear :

'My dear, will you fetch me my fan ? I have

left it on the seat yonder by the Australian lady Mrs. —— introduced to us just now—Mrs. Smith.’

She had been introduced to my wife, and she intended me to know it.

It was a marvellous performance on her part ; this sudden and totally unexpected meeting with a husband she had comfortably buried in Highgate Cemetery utterly failed to disconcert her. She had evidently foreseen that it might happen some day, and had carefully rehearsed the business of the scene so far as she was concerned.

She had been introduced to a Mrs. Smith. Directly she saw me she jumped to the conclusion that I was the Mr. Smith who was Mrs. Smith’s husband.

She fired the shot in the hope of hitting the mark, and in a moment she saw that her aim had been a good one.

I dropped my eyes and turned away to hide my confusion. I felt that my guilty face would attract attention. I talked with the people about me at random. Heaven only knows what I said ! I fancy some of them must have thought that I had had too much to drink.

At last I went on the landing and wandered into a

conservatory, and sat down in a quiet corner to try and recover my scattered senses.

A few moments' thought reassured me. Lady Lascelles could do nothing. She had buried me and married again. Feeling a little braver, I went back into the ball-room.

Our hostess came towards me :

'Ah, Mr. Smith, I have been looking for you everywhere ! I want to introduce you to a lady who is charmed with your wife, and wishes to make your acquaintance.'

She led me to a corner of the room, and there I found my wife and Lady Lascelles laughing and talking together.

'Mr. Smith—this is Lady Lascelles,' said our hostess, and then with a few words left me alone with my two wives.

By a desperate effort I rose to the situation, and joined in the conversation ; but I felt supremely uncomfortable, and I had the greatest difficulty in concealing my uneasiness.

Lady Lascelles was charming. She asked me about Australia, and inquired if I was a native or if I had gone out there from England.

Then she turned to my wife and asked her what she thought of London, and how long we were going to stay, and said that she hoped to see more of us, and was so nice and agreeable that Cora was quite charmed with her, and told me afterwards that she thought her quite the nicest person she had ever met.

Presently Sir Henry Lascelles came up, and Lady Lascelles introduced us to him, and he sat down and joined in the conversation.

It was all sheer devilry on the woman's part, but I could not help admiring it.

It was an extraordinary situation. Lady Lascelles and myself were husband and wife, and she was introducing her husband to me, and my wife sat beside her.

Soon after I asked Cora if she was not tired. I wanted to go. The comedy to me was growing hateful. I had begun to realize what it meant. Every word we two exchanged was really an insult to our two victims.

I began also to resent the look of triumph which I detected in Lady Lascelles's eyes. Her look plainly said, 'I have played my cards well; you dare not

interfere with me or betray me. You cannot take a single step without ruining yourself.'

I wanted to let her know that the secret of the cemetery was mine. I wanted to say that I had seen my own grave, and that I thoroughly appreciated the daring scheme which she had carried out with such daring effrontery.

But I had no opportunity of speaking with her alone, and so I left the explanation for a more favourable opportunity.

Cora expressed her readiness to leave at once if I was tired, and bidding Sir Henry and Lady Lascelles 'Good-night!' we went back to our hotel.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shortly afterwards we left London and went back to Australia. We went to Venice, in order that we might visit some of the famous places of France and Italy.

Before we left we received an 'at home' card from Lady Lascelles. Cora was anxious to go, but I persuaded her that she had better not. I said I had heard something about Lady Lascelles—I was very vague about it, but Cora, who had the greatest con-

fidence in my superior knowledge of the world, yielded at once.

To say that I was afraid of meeting Lady Lascelles again would not be true. I knew that I was safe, but in her presence I felt unhappy. She was the flaming sword outstretched between me and Eden. I loved Cora with all my heart and soul, and I knew that I had bitterly wronged her, and that while the other woman lived it was impossible for me to atone for that wrong.

In Australia I had brought myself to forget the past, in England it all came back to me; and from the hour I saw my first wife I was never able to dismiss it from my mind.

In the knowledge that she lived and that she knew I had married again, even the shock of my false death and burial was forgotten. Do what I would, I could not help remembering that there was a woman in England who knew what Cora's real position was, and that woman, a daring, heartless, and unscrupulous adventuress, was my lawful wife.

Three years later we came to Europe again. During the three years I had heard nothing of Lady Lascelles. Once in an English society paper Cora

had shown me her name among the list of guests at a grand entertainment, but I had studiously avoided talking about her.

Our second visit to Europe was intended to be a long one. We spent the winter in Italy and the South of France, and came to England in May, about the commencement of the London season.

While we were in Italy Cora had told me something which, though it had at first delighted me, afterwards seriously alarmed me.

She hoped to become a mother before the summer.

A mother ! And the child. I did not like to think of it. The wickedness of my conduct in marrying again came home to me now as it had never done before.

My child would be really illegitimate, and some day, in spite of all my care, its mother might learn the terrible truth.

Soon after we arrived in London I began quietly to make inquiries about Lady Lascelles.

For some time past, I ascertained, she had not been much in society.

It was understood that she was seriously ill, so ill that her life was despaired of.



Terrible as the truth is, I will confess it : from the hour that I knew Lady Lascelles was in danger I only hoped one thing, and that was that she might die in time to save my unborn child from a heritage of shame.

My position was a fearful one. I cannot perhaps hope to justify my eagerness for the death of the woman who stood between me and happiness, but at least I have said enough to make it understood.

It was early spring when we came to London. I had five months' grace—five months in which one woman could die, and another woman be saved from a shame which might one day, when she learnt the truth, kill her.

With wicked eagerness I inquired every day how Lady Lascelles was going on. I managed to make the acquaintance of a gentleman who knew Sir Henry intimately, and he assured me there was no hope.

One day I opened the *Times* in the hotel reading-room, and dropped it with a little cry of joy.

Lady Lascelles was dead !

And I was free—free to make my union with Cora a legal one—free to save my unborn child from the consequences of his father's sin.

How should I break it to Cora? What should I say to her? Tell her the truth, I dare not; and so, after some hesitation, I told her that I had a strange fancy: we had been married in Australia—I wanted to be married again in England.

Cora looked at me in blank surprise.

I hastened to reassure her. I think at first she thought I had gone suddenly mad.

It was purely a little piece of sentiment on my part. It should be a very quiet wedding, not even in a church—just before a registrar. It was an odd fancy of mine, that was all, but it would please me very much if she would consent.

Like the good dutiful little woman that she always was, she did consent, and though I am sure that she still looks back upon it as a piece of sudden insanity on my part, she went bravely through the ceremony before the registrar.

It never once crossed her mind, thank God! that she was being legally married to me for the first time, and God forbid that she should ever learn it.

In due time our boy was born, and when they laid him in my arms, and I pressed my lips to his sweet

baby face, I thanked God for His mercy in sending light where hitherto all had been darkness.

When our boy was a year old we went back to Australia, and now we have quite settled down there. It is our home, and we are happy. Some day when the boy is grown up we may all come to Europe again together, but I hope to die and be buried in Australia, which is now my home.

It is this hope which reconciles me to the fact that another man has taken my place in the family grave at Highgate.

I am afraid he will have to stop there, for it is impossible for me to take any steps to remove him without drawing attention to the fact that I had a wife when I married Cora.

So to all intents and purposes I am still a dead man in England, but as some compensation for that I am the happiest man alive in Australia.

# THE WHITE DOG :

## A GHOST STORY

It was the early morning of Christmas Day. The clock of the nearest church boomed out the hour of three. Immediately afterwards the big clock in the hall followed its example in a deep bass voice. Then the little clock in the dining-room piped out the hour of three in a childish treble. A few minutes afterwards my library clock, which has defied the efforts of the professional regulator for years, made three feeble sounds in an apologetic manner, which said as plainly as possible: 'I'm very sorry I'm so late, but better late than never.' Then the kitchen and the bedroom clocks struck, and by a quarter-past three every clock in the house had informed me what the time was—or ought to be.

It was three o'clock in the morning, or rather in the dead of the night, so that in this great lonely

house which I inhabit every sound was distinctly audible—much too audible for a nervous man, who invariably starts at the ghostly noises of the small hours, and has a vague belief in the supernatural.

Many a time, when I have been writing far into the night, have I suddenly looked up from my work, and listened, and burst into a profound perspiration as some piece of furniture in the room gave a blood-curdling creak. When the furniture takes to creaking I invariably leave off work and creep upstairs to bed.

There are two things which invariably put an end to my consumption of the midnight oil, and cause my face to be sicklied o'er with the pale cast, not of thought, but of terror. One is the creaking of the furniture, and the other is a mysterious breathing on the nape of my neck. That breathing always temporarily paralyzes me. I sit in dumb terror for a minute or two, and gradually the power of speech comes back to me, or I call to imaginary dogs to come to my assistance, and make hysterical efforts to hum popular airs of a gay and festive description.

I don't know what use a dog would be to me in a struggle with that impalpable breather on the nape of

my neck, and I cannot for the life of me imagine how I became possessed of the idea that a comic song was a charm against sepulchral intruders on one's midnight privacy. I am only telling you *what* I do ; *why* I do it I must leave for the learned in these matters to determine.

On the particular night when the adventure happened to me which I am about to relate, the clocks had all struck three. I have dwelt on the circumstance in order that you may understand my feelings when a certain extraordinary thing happened.

I was sitting alone in my library, writing. My servants had all gone to bed hours ago, and my little dogs were fast asleep in the kitchen below.

Suddenly, just as I was writing the closing lines of the story on which I was engaged, my big bookcase gave an unearthly creak, and immediately afterwards I fancied I heard a rustling behind me. I didn't turn my head—I never can when I hear a rustling in the middle of the night—and presently I felt upon the nape of my neck a tiny current of air, as though someone were breathing on it.

As soon as I had recovered from the state of abject terror into which those phenomena flung me (I shall

never get used to them if I live to be a hundred), I began my usual performance.

‘Here, Fido, Fido,’ I exclaimed; ‘where are you? Bite him, Fido—go for ’em, Fido!’

The words were hardly out of my mouth before I gave a startled cry, and, leaping out of my chair, made a wild dash at the door.

The moment I had called upon the imaginary Fido, a low growl had proceeded from beneath the table on which I was writing, and presently, to my horror, there stood before me a white dog, with wild, flaming eyes.

I had never seen the dog before. He was not one of my dogs; he was an utter stranger to me. Where on earth had he come from? You must remember that it was three o’clock in the morning, and then you will understand my astonishment at this remarkable answer to my call.

I expected that this mysterious canine visitor would spring upon me. I wasn’t sure that I shouldn’t wake up and find myself the victim of a nightmare. Imagine my astonishment when the animal walked quietly up to me and began to wag his tail.

With a great effort I managed to stoop down and pat him. He wagged his tail more than ever then,

and there was no doubt that he was a real dog of flesh and blood, and not a ghostly visitor or a creation of my disordered imagination.

But how in the name of goodness had the strange dog managed to be in my study at three in the morning? The house had been locked up since midnight, and all the time I had been at work I had not heard a sound.

I couldn't sit there with that mysterious dog. To do any more work was impossible. So, patting the strange dog again, I walked out of the room, and, closing the door behind me, went upstairs to bed.

Outside my housekeeper's bedroom door I put a piece of paper, on which I had scribbled :

'If you find a strange dog in the library, don't be frightened, and don't let him go out of the front-door—keep him till I come down.'

I was determined to fathom the mystery of the strange canine visitor, if possible.

The next morning, when I came down to breakfast, I asked about the dog. I half expected the reply would be, 'What dog, sir? We haven't seen any dog.' But it was nothing of the sort. The dog was found fast asleep in my easy-chair when the library door was opened in the morning. The housekeeper



had taken him downstairs into the kitchen and tied him up to the leg of the table.

He was a very nice dog, and he didn't look at all ghostly in the daylight. When I went downstairs and patted him he stood up on his hind-legs and tried to lick my hand.

'How in the name of goodness did he get into my study last night without anyone knowing anything about it?' I asked.

We all thought the matter over, and at last it was unanimously decided that when the housemaid went out of the front-door at eleven o'clock to lock up the area gate, the white dog, who was probably lost, must have crept in at the open door, walked into my study, concealed himself under the table, and fallen asleep there.

It is the habit of a lost dog to feel nervous and to cower and lie down in any place of shelter he may find.

My little black-and-tan dogs did not approve of the new-comer at all. They were jealous, and resented in every possible way the little attention I paid to the intruder, whom I at once christened, bearing in mind the circumstances under which I had discovered him, 'Ghost.'

It being Christmas Day, I left home early in the morning to spend the day with some relations. Christmas Day has long ceased to be a day of merriment to me. I have reached that time of life when there is too much to look back upon—too much to mourn and regret—for any anniversary to be a very joyous one. Still, Christmas, even to the most unfortunate among us, has its soothing side, and it is a day on which we can ‘gather up what joys are left’ and live our lost happiness once again, in the innocent mirth of the little ones who are the life and soul of the family party.

Of course, I told everybody about the white dog who had suddenly appeared, as if by magic, in my study in the middle of the night, and everybody was interested excepting the children.

I explained the theory by which I accounted for his getting into the house, and the elder people agreed with me, but the younger folks wouldn’t accept anything so prosaic in the way of explanation. They were sure that the white dog ‘meant’ something. One of my nieces, who had had ‘Madame D’Aulnoy’s Fairy Tales’ as a Christmas gift, hazarded the suggestion that it might be a prince who had been

turned into a dog by the fairies, and would resume his shape under certain conditions.

In the afternoon we sat round the fire between the lights, and the conversation once more turned upon the mysterious dog. Yielding to the influence of the midnight hour, I launched on a theory of my own, and suggested that perhaps, after all, Ghost was a supernatural dog, and had been sent in answer to my call for canine aid against the spirits who annoyed me by breathing on the nape of my neck at midnight.

‘Fancy if he is a ghost dog after all, uncle,’ said my niece Maudie; ‘how awfully romantic!’

My nephew Sidney, who is a year older, instantly chimed in with a vigorous ‘Bosh!’ and declared there were no ghosts of any kind, and certainly no dog ghosts. He was certain that we should find that Ghost was just a lost dog, who had seen a door open and darted in the house because he was getting cold and uncomfortable in the streets.

‘You put an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph*,’ he said, ‘and see if somebody does not come forward to claim him.’

I thought it was a very sensible suggestion, and I determined to act upon it, especially as Ghost was a

well-bred and valuable dog, and had every sign of having been a pet and well cared for.

When I reached home that night, my first inquiry was about the dog.

‘He’s been quiet enough, sir,’ said my housekeeper. ‘He slept in the big chair in the kitchen till it was dark ; then he went upstairs and lay down under the table in your study, and he’s there now.’

I went into the study and whistled, and out came the white dog. He wagged his tail, looked at me in a wistful kind of way, and then crawled back under the table again, and so I left him for the night.

The next day being Boxing Day, I could not get any handbills printed, but on Monday I set about the task of finding Ghost’s owner.

I had a fine description of him set forth in a handbill, and I gave my address and stated that the owner could have him on application to me. I also advertised him in the *Daily Telegraph*.

A week went by and I received no application, and so I made up my mind that Ghost had come to stay, and I began to consider him as one of the family.

He settled down to his new home all right, but there was one peculiarity about him. Nothing would

induce him to sleep anywhere but in my study. Directly night fell, no matter where he was, Ghost would come to my study-door and whine there until I let him in. He would walk straight under the table and curl himself up, and there he would remain.

One day, about eleven o'clock in the morning, my servant came to me and said that a gentleman wished to see me at once.

‘He says he’s come about the dog, sir.’

‘At last,’ I thought, ‘the mystery of Ghost is to be cleared up.’ Then I said aloud :

‘Show the gentleman in.’

The gentleman who came in was a tall, good-looking man, with a wild beard and large wild eyes. He looked like one of those Bohemian artists one used to meet with in the Quartier Latin in Paris in the old days before Bohemia ceased to be, and art and literature gave up eccentricity and settled down in *fin de siècle* respectability—at least of an outward appearance.

My visitor seemed thoroughly agitated. Before I could ask him to take a seat he had dropped into a chair, and was panting as if exhausted with a long walk.

‘I’ve run here,’ he exclaimed. ‘I’ve run all the way from Hampstead.’

‘Indeed!’ I said, wondering what manner of man this could be.

‘Yes; I only heard of your advertisement this morning. I heard of it at the police-station—you’ve got the dog.’

‘If you mean a white dog who came into my house most mysteriously rather more than a week ago—yes, I have——’

‘Oh dear—oh dear!’ exclaimed the strange gentleman, pulling out a large red pocket-handkerchief, ‘it’s very dreadful—it’s very awful! Has he bitten you?’

‘Good heavens, no!’ I replied, becoming seriously alarmed.

‘Has he bitten your wife or your children?’

‘I have no wife or children.’

‘Ah, that’s very lucky—very lucky! Has he bitten your other dogs, your servants, or your cat?’

‘Good gracious, no! He’s a very quiet and amiable dog. But why do you ask?’

‘Why—oh, lord!—I don’t like to tell you, but I must, of course I must—you ought to know——’

He mopped his brow again, and for a moment his face became so violently contracted I thought he was going to have a fit.

‘Pray do not keep me in suspense and almost agony! What do you know about this dog?’

‘Ah, everything—too much! It’s very dreadful! Where is he now?’

I had forgotten all about the dog for a moment in my excitement. When the question was put to me thus directly, I remembered I had last seen the dog asleep under my study table.

‘I think he’s in the room now,’ I said, lifting the table-cloth. ‘Yes; here he is. Here, Ghost, Ghost!’

My visitor uttered a wild shriek and sprang on the chair.

At the same moment Ghost, roused and alarmed, ran out. He gave one look at my visitor, then, uttering an unearthly yell, flew out of the room and dashed madly upstairs towards the bedrooms.

I was now thoroughly upset myself, and I wanted a pocket-handkerchief to wipe my own brow.

‘Will you be good enough to explain this extraordinary scene, sir! Is the dog yours?’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes—er—he was. Oh dear, how my heart’s beating! Thank goodness, he didn’t fly at me!’

‘Are you afraid of the dog, then?’

‘Afraid? Good gracious! I should think so. Why, he’s got hydrophobia!’

‘What?’ I yelled.

‘Yes, he has—he must have! It’s all my fault! I inoculated him with it and he got away.’

‘Sir, are you mad?’ I cried.

‘No—oh no! but it was a mad thing to do. I didn’t want to tell you, but it was my duty. If I’d heard that you or any of your household had died of hydrophobia, I should never have forgiven myself.’

‘The dog has displayed no symptoms of madness,’ I said; ‘he’s as quiet and gentle as possible.’

‘It takes time to develop—it has not developed yet; but it will—it must. It is an awful experiment. I oughtn’t to have done what I did. It was for true sake of science, but I have never slept since. I’m so glad he hasn’t bitten anybody.’

‘You say you inoculated the dog. Will you be good enough to explain—I must know everything, sir—it is a most serious matter.’

‘Yes, it is. I felt that, or I shouldn’t have come



here. I am a great student of these matters, you know; I analyze everything. I have discovered a cure for cancer, but you don't want to hear about that.'

'No; I want to hear about the dog.'

'Well, I got him from the Dogs' Home, and I thought I would try Pasteur's experiment for myself. I took the dog home, and having procured some virus from a dog who had died of hydrophobia, I injected it under the skin of this dog; but I didn't have proper assistance, and he got free. I was afraid of his biting me, and opened the front-door and let him out; then I saw what an awful thing I'd done. I ran after him. I didn't dare say anything, so I went back home and worried. I haven't slept properly since. I have been haunted by the idea that I had given a dog hydrophobia, and let it loose on the world.'

'It was an infamous thing to do!' I exclaimed indignantly.

'Yes, of course it was; but I never meant to let the dog escape. At any rate, I have made all the reparation in my power. Now the best thing you can do is to have the dog killed before he does any mischief. Good-morning.'

I was so astonished—to use a vulgar but expressive word, so flabbergasted—that I let the man get up and put on his hat and walk out of the house without endeavouring to stop him.

It was not until he had gone that I realized the situation in all its horror. Ghost was a dog with undeveloped hydrophobia—a dog with the deadly virus working in his veins. And he was still loose in my house.

At any moment he might develop the terrible and fatal disease; at any moment, in a fit of sudden madness, he might fasten his teeth in the flesh of one of my servants; he might fly at my own throat.

As I realized the position, I felt the cold perspiration gathering on my brow. I sat for a moment paralyzed. I did not know what to do. I felt that I must keep the terrible secret locked in my own breast. To have told my servants would have been to fling them in a state of panic.

The first thing to do was to rescue the dog. I opened my door, and stood in the hall and whistled and called, ‘Ghost, Ghost, Ghost!’ but no Ghost came.

With a forced calmness I went to the servants’

hall, and said quietly, 'Have any of you seen Ghost?'

One of them had seen him run upstairs after the gentleman called, but nobody had seen him since.

I went upstairs on to the second floor and called 'Ghost!' again, but still no Ghost appeared. Then I examined all the rooms, and looked carefully under the tables and sofas; then I went to the bedrooms, and looked carefully under the beds. There was absolutely no sign of Ghost anywhere.

What was I to do? I couldn't leave a mad dog loose in the house. It was my duty instantly to explain this, and prevent him doing any mischief; but it was a case of the recipe of jugged hare: first catch your Ghost.

I searched every room of the house for nearly an hour, and then I gave up the quest in despair, and made up my mind that Ghost had left my house as mysteriously as he had entered it.

I wondered what I ought to do under the circumstances. I made up my mind that, without alarming the public by advertisement, I had better consult the authorities. I couldn't advertise, 'Anyone meeting a white dog is requested to kill it, as it has been

inoculated with hydrophobia.' That would be to cause a panic, and to cause the death of some hundreds of innocent dogs. So I went to the police-station and related the matter to the Inspector, and left him master to deal with it as he saw fit.

I spent the day out of doors, for I was too excited and nervous to do anything, but towards night I made my way home again. I had work to attend to, which was bound to be done before the morning.

My first task on reaching home was to ask if anyone had seen Ghost. No one had.

Satisfied that he was not in the house, I sat down in my study, and was soon absorbed in the work I had in hand.

About eleven o'clock the servants went to bed, and I was the only person sitting up in the house. I heard the clock strike midnight, and then that unaccountable creepy feeling which I have formerly described came upon me. The furniture creaked and creaked, and I felt that chill moist breathing on the nape of my neck.

Instinctively—not for a moment knowing what I was doing, entirely forgetting the fearful revelation

which had been made to me that day—I put my hand under the table and whispered to an imaginary dog. In a moment I felt a cold nose under my hand, and I sprang back with a cry of horror.

And, gently wagging his tail, out from under the table crawled a white dog. It was Ghost.

At that moment I was a prey to the most abject terror. I stared at the dog with eyes almost starting from my head. I had retreated to the fireplace; further retreat was impossible.

And slowly towards me, nearer and nearer, came the white dog. He must have concealed himself all day in some top room, one of the garrets or the lumber-room, perhaps; and when all was quiet he must have stolen down and gone to his usual place under my table. I was too absorbed in my work to hear him enter, and he had laid quietly dozing until now.

Gradually I regained my self-possession. It was no good letting the dog see that I was afraid of him. He had evidently no hostile intentions towards me. But his affection was as dangerous as his amity. A mad dog can communicate hydrophobia by licking your hand. I remembered with horror how often

during the past week Ghost had favoured me with that sign of canine affection.

I went to a drawer in my room where I kept an old pair of gloves, and I carefully drew them on ; then I sat down and let Ghost come up to me, and with my gloved hand I patted his head, and told him to go and lie down again. He wagged his tail and went back under the table.

‘He has not developed any of the symptoms yet,’ I thought to myself, ‘but he may at any moment. It will never do to let him come again. I’ll secure him tight, and to-morrow I’ll fetch a veterinary surgeon and consult him as to what ought to be done.’

As soon as I was satisfied that Ghost was lying down again under the table, I turned the gas down, crept to the door, went out, pulled it to and then locked it, and put the key in my pocket. I then went upstairs and put a note under the housekeeper’s door, telling her that no one was to try and open the study door, as it was locked. I had left some papers about ; that was the explanation I gave, as I did not want to raise an alarm about the dog.

I then went to bed, but I could not sleep for hours. When I did, I had a most terrible nightmare. I

dreamt that a huge white dog with flaming eyes was sitting on my chest and endeavouring to lick my face, and I was trying to prevent him because he was mad.

The next morning I woke with a splitting headache. I went down to breakfast, and the servants told me that I must have shut Ghost in the study, for he had been whining and snatching at the handle of the door.

‘All right,’ I said, ‘I’ll let him out directly.’ But instead of letting him out I put on my hat and was just going off to fetch a surgeon from the Royal Veterinary College, like my friend Professor Pritchard or my friend Professor Axe, when the servant informed me that an inspector of police wished to see me.

It was the inspector to whom I had confided my exciting adventure on the previous day.

As soon as he had been shown into the dining-room he asked me what I had done with the dog.

I told him all that had happened, and that the dog was at present locked in my study.

‘That’s all right,’ he said; ‘I thought perhaps you had had him killed.’

‘ You have ascertained something about the gentleman who called here ?’ I said.

‘ Yes, sir, and that’s why I have come to see you. Directly you had gone yesterday I instructed one of my men to make full inquiries, as it was such a serious and extraordinary affair. The first thing we did was to trace the dog. It was evidently purchased at the Dogs’ Home about ten days ago. It had been found in the streets a day or two previously, and not claimed. Somebody had, however, recognised it as a dog who had been seen about with a foreigner, a German gentleman who had chambers in the Strand. The gentleman had gone abroad, and it is supposed lost the dog before he started, and hadn’t been to make inquiries or sent for it.

‘ At any rate it was detained, and when a gentleman—the curious-looking gentleman you described, for the description tallies—came and wanted a dog, this one was shown to him, and he bought it and took it away, leaving his address in case the rightful owner should at any time make inquiries.

‘ Furnished with that address, we continued our investigation. We went to the house and ascertained that the gentleman, who lived there alone with a man-



servant, had brought the dog home with him and taken it to his room. Some time afterwards the man heard the door open and saw the dog fly out. He happened to be standing at the front-door, and the dog bolted past him. His master came down the stairs in a state of great excitement and ran after the dog.'

'The rest I know,' I interposed. 'He ran after him as far as the Park, when he lost sight of him. The dog evidently saw my front-door open—my housemaid was out locking the area gate—ran in and hid under my table, and lay there quietly until I discovered him.'

'Yes,' said the inspector, 'I expect that's about how it happened; but let me finish my story. As soon as possible one of my men got hold of this manservant and pumped him about his master. He wasn't inclined to be very communicative at first, but as soon as my man explained that it was a police inquiry, he made no bones about telling the whole truth.'

'His master is an eccentric gentleman of fortune, and he himself is partly valet, partly keeper. He lives in the house with him, and looks after him for the family.'

‘A madman!’ I exclaimed. ‘I might have known it. None but a madman would have tried such a hideous and awful experiment.’

‘Well, not exactly a madman, from what we have been able to ascertain,’ said the inspector, ‘but decidedly cracked—subject to hallucinations. It seems that he has got one big bee in his bonnet, and that is that he is a great scientific investigator. He thinks he has discovered a cure for cancers and a cure for consumption. He reads the medical journals, and tries experiments in a room he calls his laboratory. Once or twice he nearly blew himself up with chemicals.’

‘But about the dog?’

‘Well, it seems lately he has been reading a great deal about hydrophobia and Pasteur’s experiments, and he conceived the idea that he would try and be the English Pasteur; so he went to the Dogs’ Home, and got a dog, to begin with.’

‘Why did his keeper, or his servant, or whatever you like to call him, allow such a thing?’

‘He hadn’t the slightest idea what he was going to do, he says. He simply thought he’d bought a dog and brought it home. It was not till after-

wards that he learnt he'd been trying experiments on it.'

'Where did he get the virus, or whatever the stuff is?'

'My dear sir, he never got any at all. That's where his madness comes in.'

'What! do you mean to say he didn't do anything to the dog?'

'Oh yes, he undoubtedly ran the point of a needle into the dog, and that made the dog leap up and bolt, and it was recollecting that needle made the dog howl and run away when the poor lunatic came to see you.'

'But the virus which was on the point of the needle?'

'Nothing to hurt. It seems that he told his man a day or two ago to get him some hydrophobia virus. If he asked for a bit of the moon, the man would go out and bring him in something. He always says that it is part of his duty. So he went out and bought a sixpenny bottle of gum, mixed a little of it with flour and water, and put it in a little phial, and said he had brought it from the College of Surgeons.'

'Then there was no virus on the needle?'

'Absolutely none. I have ascertained beyond a

shade of doubt that the facts are as I tell them to you.'

I jumped up, and ran to the study door and unlocked it. Ghost came bounding out, and followed me into the dining-room.

'Here is the dog,' I said.

The inspector stooped down and patted him.

'He is a nice dog,' he said, 'and I should say there is not an atom of virus about him. At any rate, there is no hydrophobia.'

He held his hand out and the dog licked it.

I was satisfied that the inspector had ascertained the truth of the story he'd told me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ghost, the white dog who came to me one night in such a mysterious way, is still a member of my household, and he still lies at night under my study table while I am at work. I never saw the poor mad fellow, who gave me such a terrible fright, again; and I am by no means anxious to renew the honour of his acquaintance.

He gave me a very bad twenty-four hours, and night, had I been less cautious, have flung my household into a state of absolute panic. I am quite sure,

had my servants ever known the story, there is not one of them who would not have given me notice on the spot and have fled from the presence of that terrible white dog ; and they would probably have been haunted with the fear of developing sudden symptoms of hydrophobia for the rest of their natural lives.

Ghost, so far from suffering from the madman's experiment, profited by it. When he fled in terror from the prick of his new master's needle, chance led him to a home where his many good qualities are appreciated, and where he will be an honoured guest as long as he lives. He is one of the few whose position has been materially improved by the hydrophobia scare.

## THAT ACT OF PARLIAMENT

JIM DESTER was a waiter, and, as his name implies, an English waiter. He had, apart from his profession, two great occupations in life—one was backing horses, and the other was abusing foreigners. Jim was generally out of employment. He attributed the fact to foreign competition and ‘them darned Germans’; his friends thought that his intense devotion to the ‘sport of kings,’ and consequent neglect of duty, had more to do with it.

Be that as it may, Jim had long ago drifted out of regular employment, and was content to be taken on now and again as ‘a extry hand’ in busy times. He didn’t feel his position so acutely as he might have done, because he had a good hard-working wife, who went out nursing, and she, having a good connection, was able to comfortably furnish and to pay the rent

of the three rooms they occupied in Bayham Street, Camden Town.

Jim was very fond of his 'missis,' and freely confessed that she was a jolly good sort. He always maintained, however, that her frequent absences from home entailed by her professional duties were a bit of a drawback to his domestic happiness, especially as in her absence Jim and his only son, a lad of eighteen, didn't get on well together at all.

Tom Dester was an object lesson in heredity. He not only at an early age developed a pronounced partiality for sporting literature, and hazarded sundry shillings on 'morals,' 'dead certs,' and even occasionally 'went nap' on a 'real good thing' to the extent of half a crown, but he also inherited the paternal characteristic of being constantly out of employment.

His mother doted on him, and by her individual exertions procured him place after place, but Tom never stayed longer than a month. He had been errand boy at a grocer's, at a fruiterer's, at a linen-draper's, and at a chemist's, but in each instance he had lost his place after a very short probation. The first duty of an errand boy is to go his errands 'with

punctuality and despatch.' Tom Dester might have been backed with safety to be longer on an errand than any other errand boy in the three kingdoms.

He wasn't dismissed from the grocer's, because there he was employed about the shop, but this position he resigned. They put him to tie up pounds of tea and bags of sugar, and the young man's dignity revolted at the menial occupation. He resigned at the end of a week, and told his mother that 'there wasn't nothing to be learned at tying string round paper bags, and he wasn't going to waste his time at it.'

What with an idle husband and an idle son, both of a sporting turn of mind and given to snack each other and 'row' when they were together at home, poor Mrs. Dester's lot was anything but a happy one.

It would have been an intense relief to her to be called away on a month's job but for one fact. That fact was the habit her husband had lately developed of selling or pawning, during her absence, various articles which went to make up the little home. In order to raise ready money for the purposes of turf speculation, Jim Dester thought nothing of parting with portions of his wife's wardrobe, or the clock, or



the winter blankets. He had even on one great occasion, when he had heard of a 'moral' for the City and Suburban at 33 to 1, called on a dealer and disposed of the bulk of the sitting-room furniture for ready cash. The sale realized three pounds, just the amount wanted to enable Jim to win a hundred.

When his wife came back and found only one chair for the three of them, and no sideboard and no clock, and various other articles missing, she sat down on the one chair (Jim was gallant enough to offer it to her and stand himself) and wept. Her husband begged her not to 'take on.' What he had done he had done for the best. He had merely parted with a sprat in order to catch a mackerel. The Snark was certain to win the City and Suburban, and with the hundred pounds they would be able to buy any amount of furniture and of much superior quality to that with which he had parted.

Mrs. Dester was not to be consoled. She had heard of Jim's certainties before; but being a sensible little woman, and knowing that to cry over spilt milk won't put it back in the jug, she presently dried her eyes and worked herself up into a temper, and vowed that she would have a separation, and go

to a magistrate and see if the law wouldn't protect her earnings.

She had never uttered such a threat before. Jim Dester at first could hardly believe his ears. He had very pronounced views of the duty of a wife to her husband, and was a devout believer in the inferiority of women. The words which his wife uttered were to him rank blasphemy. They caused him the most intense pain. It was with difficulty that he mastered his emotion sufficiently to express his sentiments in coherent words.

His face flushed, his bosom heaved, the indignant man and the outraged husband had a fierce struggle in his breast for the first word.

His first idea was that he ought to give a lesson to the entire sex by administering personal chastisements. But he conquered his wrath and fell back upon his dignity.

'Maria,' he said, as calmly as his emotion would allow him to, 'if them's your sentiments the time has come for us to part.'

'Very well,' replied his wife, 'and I think so too, and the sooner the better. I'm sick o' slavin' and toilin' to support a lazy brute who, directly my back's

turned, goes and sells everything as I've bought with my own earnings. Oh yes, you can look, and looks ain't arguments. It's true, and you know it. I've kept you for years—you've lived on me, that's what you've done, and you call yourself a man ?'

'Maria,' yelled Jim Dester, 'how dare you speak to your own lawfully begotten husband like that ! What's come to you, woman ? You've been nussin' in some Radical family, and you've become a hatheist.'

'Don't you call me a hatheist. I've been a good woman to you, and I've kept you in idleness, worked hard for you, and kept the home together, and what's my reward ? This !'

Mrs. Dester pointed to the solitary chair with a gesture worthy of Mrs. Siddons in her best days.

'Oh, that's your game, is it ?' exclaimed Jim. 'You're going to ride the high hoss, are you ?'

'I ain't agoin' to ride no hoss at all, Jim Dester. I leave the hosses to you, and much good may they do you, but I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm agoing before a magistrate this very minute, and I'm going to expose you. I'm sick of it. What I earn

I'll have, and what's bought with my money is mine under the Property Woman's Marriage Act, and that's what you've got to learn.'

'Don't talk to me about your Hacts, if you please, madam—a beastly low Hact as was passed by a lot o' dirty Radicals. Don't mention it in my 'ome. I'm a Henglishman, and I'm proud of it, and a Henglishman's home is 'is castle.'

'No, it ain't; it's his wife's castle if she pays for it, and if you don't believe it, put on your hat and come with me to the magistrate.'

'What! me go before a magistrate and take his orders about my own 'ome! What's a magistrate to do with me, or my 'ome, or my wife, I should like to know? Don't be a fool, Maria.'

'No; I ain't going to be a fool, Jim Dester. I've been one long enough,' exclaimed the little woman, getting up off the solitary chair and pacing the room. 'I'm going to have my earnings protected and my furniture protected; and I'll have a magistrate's order, so that you shan't touch another stick of my property, do you understand that? You don't back horses with my chairs and tables again; you don't put my winter cloak on a horse again; and you don't

put my sheets and blankets on horses again ! If you want to back horses go and work—go and earn your own money, and you can bet with that if you like ! I can do without it, thank God ! I can earn my own living—go and earn yours.’

‘Do you mean that, Maria ?’ said Jim Dester, drawing himself up, and assuming an air of injured innocence.

‘Yes ; I do mean it.’

‘Then farewell, Maria,’ exclaimed Dester, raising his hat, and putting it on and ramming it down on his brow with a bang on the top—‘farewell for ever. I have my pride, and after the atrocious sentiments you’ve just uttered, I’d sooner beg my bread from door to door than be beholden to you for a crust.’

And without waiting to see the effect of his magnificent burst of heroic sentiment upon his astonished wife, Jim Dester turned on his heel (indignant heroes always turn on their heel), and went out of the door and down the stairs into the first public-house he came to, and it wasn’t till he’d called for a whisky cold and drained it to the last drop that he discovered that he hadn’t a copper in his pocket to pay for it

with. Under these humiliating circumstances he borrowed a shilling of the landlord, who knew him, and went out into the world again with the ninepence change, a heart-broken husband and a humiliated man.

He walked about for a couple of hours ; he went to a quiet little waiters' club, where there was a tape and a ready-money bookmaker, and a lot of waiters, native and foreign—like himself, most of them, out of employment, but all finding somehow or other a few spare shillings to lose at cards or to put on horses—and there he succeeded in borrowing five shillings of an 'old pal' who had backed a winner and won a couple of pounds.

He was determined to show his wife that he was independent, and earn his own living, and do without her assistance ; and he had fully made up his mind that he would not go back until she came and apologized for her cruel words and humbly begged him to return to the conjugal roof.

Towards five o'clock in the afternoon, however, he found himself in front of his house again ; an irresistible impulse led him thither. He walked up and down on the opposite side of the

street, smoking his pipe and keeping his eye on the door.

Presently he saw his son come out. Tom was looking very downcast, so his father crossed the road and spoke to him.

‘Seen your mother, Tom?’ he said.

‘Yes. I don’t know what’s come to her; she’s been going on at me. Says I’m as bad as you, and no good to nobody.’

‘A nice way to talk to a boy about his father, that!’ exclaimed Jim.

‘Well, you can stand it if you like; I ain’t going to,’ said Tom. ‘I ain’t agoin’ to be grudged what I eat and drink. I’m agoin’ for a soldier, so good-bye; and you can tell mother if I’m—if I’m shot in battle, I don’t bear her no grudge.’

And before his astonished father could reply Tom Dester had marched off down the street, and was speedily out of sight.

‘This is a nice thing,’ said Mr. Dester to himself. ‘This comes of them —— Radical Hacts o’ Parliament. Where’s the sanctity o’ marriage, I should like to know, when a woman can turn her husband out o’ doors, and send his only son to be shot at by

the Rooshens ? What's the good o' sending misshuns to the heathen when this sort of thing goes on in a Christian country according to Hact o' Parliament ?'

Mr. Dester's mind was so full of the ghastly state of affairs that he gave up watching his front-door and went back to the club, where he spent the remainder of his five shillings, got drunk, and was put out into the street at two o'clock in the morning for throwing a spittoon at the head of a Radical member after a violent political argument, in which he (Mr. Dester) had at the top of his voice denounced the followers of Mr. Gladstone as 'a set o' 'owlin hatheists, who were underminin' the British Empire and knocking the marriage service into a cocked 'at.'

And as after his ejection Mr. Dester hammered violently at the door and in a loud voice demanded everybody's blood, the police presently came upon the scene and marched him off to the station and provided him with his night's lodging.

And for once in his life he had earned it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Dester, you see, had turned at last. A worm will turn, and so will a married woman. She loved her husband and her son, but the sight of her dis-



mantled home had been too much for her, and she had turned upon the lazy, good-for-nothing pair one after the other.

She didn't get over her indignation till Tom had marched out of the house, and then she threw herself down in the only chair and had a good cry.

She was crying, when a knock came at the door, and the landlady, who inhabited the lower regions, came up to say that Mrs. Dester was wanted at once.

Mrs. Dester went down and found it was a messenger from a doctor, who was one of her patrons ; a lady who was not expected to require Mrs. Dester's services for another month had been taken suddenly ill, and would Mrs. Dester go at once.

There was nothing for the poor woman to do but to pack up a few things and go. But first she wrote a little note to her husband and stuck it on the mantelshelf. It was a little message of forgiveness, asking him to forget what she'd said, and also to tell Tom she was sorry, and that she'd try and come home for an hour on Sunday and see how things were getting on, and she'd left Jim half a sovereign to go on with ; and she hoped that he wouldn't part with any more of the furniture or her wardrobe, as it

cost such a lot to get the things back again. Then she went off to the lady and tried to forget her own troubles in the cares and anxieties of the sick-room.

She would not have succeeded so well as she did had she known that night that her husband was sleeping off the effects of five shillings' worth of whisky in a damp police cell, and that her son had taken the shilling and enlisted in one of her Majesty's regiments, and that her little forgiving note had the deserted home all to itself.

The next morning Jim Dester was duly charged at the police court. He felt very sick, and he looked very sheepish when he was put in the dock. The proprietor of the club did not wish to press the charge, and the police having nothing against the prisoner, his case was soon disposed of, Mr. Jim Dester being fined twenty shillings, with the alternative of seven days.

Jim hadn't got the twenty shillings, and he objected to the seven days, so he sent a messenger to his wife, and the messenger, hearing at the house where she was, went off to the address, and bluntly informed the good lady that her 'old man' had been fined a sovereign for being drunk, and that he was being

kept as a hostage by the police until his ransom was duly paid.

Mrs. Dester was naturally horrified. She wasn't able to leave the lady, so she sent the money by the messenger, and wrote a little note asking Jim to call on her at once; and a few hours afterwards Jim, looking very seedy and generally the worse for wear, presented himself to his wife's indignant gaze.

The interview took place in the hall, and was naturally carried on in an undertone, Mrs. Dester not wishing the servants to know that her lord and master was just fresh from an interview with outraged justice.

'Don't go on at me, Maria,' said Jim; 'don't say nothing 'ard, 'cus I can't bear it.'

'I'm not going to say nothing hard, Jim; all I hope is as it'll be a warning to you.'

'It's wus than a warning, Maria, it's a blow; and it's a hit below the belt, and it's clean took my wind away. I'm knocked out, Maria, and I can't come up to time.'

'Why, you ain't got to come up again, have you, Jim?' exclaimed the good woman, horrified. 'I thought the case was disposed of.'

‘I’m speaking figurative, Maria. I shall never hold my head up in London again; at least, not till this orful ’umiliation is forgot. Lend me a couple o’ pounds, Maria, and I’ll go down and see my old gov’nor as has took a resterong at Manchester. He’ll give me a berth or get me one. I’ll pay you back out of the hunderd I’m bound to win over the City and Suburband.’

Mrs. Dester sighed. She didn’t believe in her husband a bit, but she felt that if he were away at Manchester and at work, he would not be making further sales of her household goods, and so she produced the two pounds.

‘Very well, Jim,’ she said, ‘it won’t do you no harm to be at work again, and I hope you’ll go, and not get putting your money on horses.’

‘Not me, Maria. You won’t never have to tell me I live on you again. I’m going to be independent.’

‘Don’t be hard, Jim. I couldn’t help being upset to find half the furniture gone. I’m not sorry, though, of your going to Manchester. But what’ll Tom do? He don’t seem to try to get anything to do, and I don’t like his being all alone at home.’

‘Oh, you needn’t fret about him neither, my dear, now. He’s independent too—he’s ’listed.’

‘What!’ screamed Mrs. Dester, forgetting her caution. ‘Tom’s ’listed! Oh, Jim, you don’t mean it?’

‘Yes, I do—at least, he said he was going for a soldier. Let him go; it won’t do him any harm.’

The poor woman’s eyes were filled with tears. She had a loving mother’s horror of the army. She instantly pictured her boy a mangled corpse on the battlefield, his limbs being scattered about in different directions by shells and cannon balls.

‘Oh, my poor Tom, my poor Tom!’ she wailed. ‘I’d sooner have kept him in idleness all his days than he should have done that. Jim, you must go and find out where he is, and he must be bought off.’

‘Nonsense,’ replied her husband. ‘If he’s ’listed let him have a taste o’ the baccy. It’ll do him good, and make a man of him. Besides, it costs a lot o’ money to buy off, and you ain’t going to waste your money on him or me any more. No, Maria; you’ve thrown the Hact o’ Parliament in my face, and not one penny o’ your earnings do I ever touch again;

and if the boy's to be bought off I'll do it myself—when I can afford it.'

Before he made this speech Jim Dester had carefully pocketed his wife's two pounds. But with that trifling exception, he honestly meant what he said.

At that moment a servant came downstairs and told Mrs. Dester she was wanted at once in the side room, so with a hurried handshake husband and wife parted, and that was to be the last meeting for a long time to come.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Snark finished absolutely last for the City and Suburban, and Jim Dester found himself in Manchester with his available capital reduced to quite a nominal sum. He had, therefore, to look about without loss of time for something to do. He had not been quite candid with his wife. He had come to Manchester because he had an old governor established there who was friendly to him, but he was also anxious to be away from London in case the Snark should after all fail to get home for the City and Suburban. The truth is he had, in the language of *la haute finance*, negotiated a loan some time ago when he was in a good situation for five-and-twenty pounds,

and had signed something which he called 'a paper' for it. He didn't take the trouble to master the contents of the paper, because at the time the loan was, as he said, a mere temporary arrangement. He was going to make a fortune within a very short time by putting ten pounds on a dark horse for the Derby—a horse which an exceedingly clever division were confident could beat all the other horses engaged in that classic race by the length of a street. As this ten pounds was put on at the extremely remunerative odds of 50 to 1, and Mr. Dester would, therefore, shortly be the proud and happy possessor of five hundred pounds, he didn't take much care of the odd fifteen pounds, but had a couple of days at a suburban race meeting with it, and promptly got rid of the lot.

It never entered his head to spend any of it on his home, or his wife, or his son. He had married a hard-working little woman, with an excellent nursing connection among the best families; a clever woman too, who had her certificate, and was highly recommended by 'the faculty.' Being in constant employment and earning good money, Mrs. Dester had been generously allowed by her husband to get the home

together and provide all the necessary household expenses. Jim felt that the honour of having him as a husband was an ample return for her outlay. He wasn't a bad-hearted man—not what the world would call a scoundrel. He was merely a careless, selfish man, who thought of nobody but himself, and who felt that when he did earn anything he was entitled to spend it entirely as he chose. For over eighteen years he had lived in this way, and it was not till he parted with his furniture behind his wife's back that the said back, like the camel's, was broken and the last straw caught fire and led to a general domestic conflagration.

And then for the first time his obedient and long-suffering wife so far forgot herself as to inform her lord and master that he was only a guest in his own house, and to crush him with an Act of Parliament. He had never recognised the situation before. He had never seriously considered it. It seemed to him, a free-born Englishman with all the advantages of early Sunday-school teaching, that a wife was a chattel to do what he liked with, and that any pretence on her part to have separate interests or private property was flying in the face of the marriage



service, and utterly opposed to the teachings of Christianity. As soon as he had grasped his wife's meaning he put this new departure down to the spread of Radicalism and atheistical teaching, which he considered the curse of the age. He objected to it on religious grounds, on political grounds, and on personal grounds he felt it most deeply of all. All the pride of his manhood revolted against the idea, and, as you are aware, he left his home, got drunk, was locked up all night, borrowed his fine and two pounds over from his wife, and left for Manchester in order that he might once more eat the bread and drink the beer of independence.

He succeeded in getting a situation, not with his old governor, but his old governor recommended him to the manager of a hotel where extra hands were wanted, and Jim had the satisfaction of being taken on at a good wage, with a fair chance of 'making a bit,' and as it was a place where board and lodging were provided in the house, he was for a time 'on velvet.'

He wrote to his wife at once, and informed her that he was on the highroad to fortune. He had secured a good place, he should save money, and not

return until he was in a position to be master of his own house by right of purchase and by right of payment.

His wife wrote back to him. She had been home for an hour or two, and seen to the things, and she forwarded him a letter which had come for him. She was very sorry to be separated from him, but as he was in a good place and earning money she would endeavour to bear it. She concluded with much love, and the assurance that when he wanted to come home he was to remember that there would always be a welcome for him at Bayham Street, Camden Town.

Jim read his wife's letter, and then opened the one enclosed in it. It was a letter from the man he owed twenty-five pounds 'and interest' to, and was full of vague threats of legal proceedings 'without further notice,' etc. Jim threw it in the fire, and immediately wrote back to his wife requesting her under no circumstances to give his address to anyone. 'He didn't want a lot of his old associates to write to him and give him tips for races, as he was going to give up betting and he didn't want to be led into temptation.' When he had posted the letter he chuckled.

‘They’ll have to find me first before they can take legal proceedings,’ he said to himself, ‘and if the old woman don’t split I’m safe here.’

He kept his place, but he didn’t save money. He soon found that Manchester was almost as big a sporting centre as London, and he continued to back his fancy with the usual disastrous results. If he won on one race he lost on six, and the end of the week generally found him ‘a bit to the bad.’

The most remarkable thing about the little punters, the men who back horses without knowing anything about horses, is that no amount of loss, no amount of milling, ever makes them see the utter hopelessness of their task. Gambling is a form of insanity. It is as hard to wean a gambler from gambling as it is a drunkard from drink, a vicious man from vice, or a criminal from crime. A gambler will let his wife and children starve, he will starve himself, and still risk his last coin on the hazard of the die, the turn of the card, or the speed of a horse.

After he had been in Manchester a month he received a very important statement from his wife. She enclosed him another letter which had come for him, and she told him that she had seen her dear boy,

and he was truly repentant, and quite a reformed young man. He was sick of the army, where the work was awful, and so she paid the sum of fifty pounds and bought him out and secured for him a place in the City, where she was sure he would now do well and become a credit to his father and mother.

Jim dropped the letter and sat with his mouth wide open in astonishment.

‘Fifty pounds!’ he exclaimed. ‘My wife’s got fifty pounds put by! She’s been hoarding; she’s been deceiving me and hoarding all these years. She’s got money put away—money in the bank; she’s gone and spent fifty in a lump on my scamp of a son, and here am I working hard and wearing myself out away from my comfortable home, and worrying myself about a paltry five-and-twenty pound debt I’ve contracted in a legitimate way of business! This is more than human flesh and blood can stand. I’m off home!’

He was so excited that he put the letter in his pocket, and with it the enclosure unopened. It was his badge of servitude he was wearing—his waiter’s coat. He went upstairs and took it off in his room,

rammed it into his old portmanteau with his other things, put on his private clothes, and went downstairs and told the head-waiter that he was called home on urgent private business. Then he borrowed a sovereign from a young German waiter, who'd only been taken on a week, and went to the railway-station, took his ticket, got into the train, arrived in London, took a hansom (a man whose wife has money in the bank doesn't walk or get outside a bus), and reached Bayham Street just as his wife and son were sitting down to supper.

'Lor, Jim! Why, whatever's happened?' said his wife, jumping up.

'Hullo, father,' said his son, and went on with his supper.

Jim took his hat off, surveyed the domestic scene for a moment in silence, and exclaimed sarcastically, 'Oh yes. I dare say it is "Lor, Jim," and I dare say it is "Hullo, father." You didn't expect to see me?'

'No, I didn't, Jim,' replied his wife. 'I hope nothing's wrong?'

'Oh no, nothing particular. I dare say it's all right according to Hact o' Parliament. There's

nothing in the Hact as says a wife shan't squander fifty pounds on a lazy, hulking boy while his father's a hunted fugitive, a-flyin' from justice for the sake of a paltry five-and-twenty.'

'A hunted fugitive! Flying from justice! Oh, Jim,' gasped Mrs. Dester, 'what do you mean?'

'What I say, Maria: that it ain't decent—it ain't Christian—as I should be a-toilin' and a-waitin' from seven a.m. till midnight in a strange land' (he meant Manchester) 'for a paltry pittance, because I owe five-and-twenty pounds, while my own flesh and blood's eating cold beef and pickled cabbage in happiness and luxury, and the Government's been paid fifty pounds for the privilege of him doing of it. That may be Hact o' Parliament, Maria, but I'm —— if it's justice, and as a husband and a father I ain't going to stand it. So there!'

'Jim—I—I——'

'Don't prevaricate, Maria; there ought to be no secrets between husband and wife. It says so in the Bible, and you're still a Christian, I hope. If you are, if you ain't dead to every religious sentiment, answer me one question, How much have you got in the bank?'

‘Not a penny, Jim ; I swear it.’

‘What, you only had fifty, and you spent it all on him !’

‘I hadn’t fifty, Jim—I only had thirty ; but I borrowed the rest, and the gentleman he’s going to, whose wife I nursed through a very bad time, is going to stop it out of Tom’s wages a bit at a time till it’s paid—isn’t he, Tom ?’

‘Yes, mother,’ said Tom, with his mouth full of pickled cabbage.

Jim Dester dropped into a chair. ‘Then you haven’t got five-and-twenty to spare.’

‘No, Jim, I haven’t, and if I had——’ Mrs. Dester didn’t think it prudent to finish, so she simply added, ‘Sit down and have some supper, and we’ll talk about it to-morrow.’

The next morning Mrs. Dester, having obtained from her husband a full, true and particular account of the twenty-five pounds trouble, went out directly after breakfast.

Tom went off to his new situation, and Jim lit a pipe and sat in the armchair (redeemed by Mrs. Dester during his absence), and looked gloomily at the floor.

He had been alone about two hours, when the landlady came up and announced a gentleman who wanted to see him.

The gentleman followed the landlady and walked in.

‘James Dester?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, it ain’t a particularly pleasant business I’ve come on, but you may as well know it at once. I’ve got the paper’ (he showed something printed on a blue paper to Jim). ‘It’s all in order, and I’ve come to take your goods for five-and-twenty pounds.’

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Jim, jumping up; ‘you don’t mean——’

‘Yes, I do. You’ve had notice.’

‘Oh lor!’ groaned Jim, as he recollected the unopened letter in his waiter’s coat. ‘What did I come back for?—only to see the ’ome swept away!’

‘Werry sorry,’ said the intruder. ‘Only doing my duty. Beastly sort o’ duty, but we must all do it. That’s what Nelson said at the Battle o’ Waterloo, you know. I’ll just make a hinventery, if you don’t mind.’



‘You’ll make a what?’ exclaimed a female voice behind him.

‘Hulloh!’ said the man, turning round. ‘Ladies present. Very sorry. Makes duty worse than ever. Don’t make a scene, mum, please. I’m a husband myself, and it goes to my ’art. I’ll just make a hinventory.’

‘Oh no, you won’t.’

‘Look here, mum: you don’t want a scandal, do you; you don’t want a row, and the police and the neighbours to come in, do you?’

‘No.’

‘Then, you just let me do my business.’

‘You’ve got no business here.’

‘Yes, I have, with your husband—leastways with his goods.’

‘Then go where his goods are!’ exclaimed Mrs. Dester, at the top of her voice. ‘They aren’t his. Do you hear that. Every stick here’s mine, bought by me, paid for by me with my own lawful earnings. The rooms are mine—I pay the rent; the furniture’s mine—I bought it. And now get out.’

‘Oh, that’s all very fine.’

‘Yes, it is, but it’s all right. I guessed what was going to happen from what my husband told me, and I’ve been and got the law and paid for it, and now you touch a thing if you dare. Come with me to my solicitor if you like, come before a magistrate if you like, and I’ll prove it to you. Every stick here belongs to me, and you can’t touch as much as the dustpan for my husband’s debts, do you see. My things are protected by Act of Parliament.’

The man saw that the woman was speaking the truth.

‘—— that Married Woman’s Property Hact,’ he yelled, ‘it’s always a-croppin’ up when you don’t expect it. Good-morning; I’ll go and consult my employer.’

And he went downstairs.

‘Now, Jim,’ exclaimed Mrs. Dester, going to her husband, ‘the Act o’ Parliament’s saved our home, and you can take your time and pay when you can, and till you can you’re welcome to make yourself comfortable here.’

Jim looked at his wife a moment, then he caught her in his arms and hugged her.

‘Maria,’ he said, ‘I apologize. That Hact o’ Parliament is a noble institution. It makes a Hinglishman’s home his castle and saves him from his hungry creditors. God bless that Hact o’ Parliament!’

## MY MOTHER'S CRIME

I WAS alone in the library with *her* father—with the father of my beloved. I don't know when I first fell in love with her, and she confessed to me that she couldn't be sure of the day when she first came to look upon me with other feelings than those of friendship.

You see, we had known each other from little children. Katie's papa was Mr. Mayfield, the Squire of our village, and my Aunt Linthorpe was the widow of Colonel Linthorpe, who had been the Squire's bosom friend. Our house was the nearest house to the Hall, and I was constantly being invited by Harry Mayfield to go and play with him. Harry Mayfield was about my own age. I rode his pony and read his books and went birds'-nesting with him, and there was rarely a week passed that I was not invited to the Hall to take tea.

Katie Mayfield was a year younger than Harry. She didn't like the birds'-nesting, and Harry's favourite books were not quite what she cared about. Girls never can see the fun of running away to sea, and they hate pirates and savages, and a fight, even when it is between a brave little fellow and a big bully, they always skip.

But at the tea-table a sister is always an agreeable companion, and I think I liked the teas almost as much as the birds'-nesting and the pirates, for Katie was always the first to ask me if I would have any more cake or jam.

Boys never look after you at the tea-table like girls do, and I made up my mind very soon after I knew Katie and her brother that it is much nicer to go out to tea where there are girls than where there are only boys.

It was a great blow to me when Harry Mayfield went away to school. I asked my aunt if I could go to school like Harry. He was going to a preparatory school first, and then to Eton, and afterwards to Oxford. I was sure that he would play in the Eton eleven and row in the Oxford eight. He said he meant to ; and I think that was one thing that made

me want to go to his school, and then to Eton and Oxford, with him.

I spoke to my aunt about it, but she looked very grave, and shook her head, and said it was quite impossible. I should have to have a private tutor at home, and perhaps afterwards I should go to a German University.

I knew by experience that it was no good arguing with my aunt or asking too many questions. Directly I began to ask questions she always pretended she had something to see to in her house, and, as Harry used to say, 'politely shut me up.'

I never knew anybody who hated answering questions more than my Aunt Linthorpe. I remember once I was talking to her, and I began to talk about my mother and father, whom I could hardly remember, and she was quite sharp with me.

I only said to her, 'Aunty, as my name is Linthorpe and your name is Linthorpe, your husband must have been my father's brother.' She only said 'Well?' to that; but directly I began to ask her about my mamma and papa, and how old I was when they died, and a few very natural questions for a boy who is an orphan to ask, she got quite angry, and said that if

there was one thing that made her head ache it was talking about relationships.

I left off asking my aunt about my father and mother when I found it annoyed her, but Harry told me he'd heard his papa and mamma say that I was quite a little thing, only about five years old, when I was sent to my aunt's house, and he told me that they used to refer to me sometimes as 'poor little chap.'

I fancy that my papa died suddenly, and my mamma died soon afterwards, and as I had no friends in the world, my dear good Aunt Linthorpe 'adopted' me.

I am sure that my own father and mother could not have been kinder to me, for she brought me up as though I had been her own son, instead of her nephew. I had everything I wanted, for my aunt, though not as rich as the Squire, was very comfortably off, and when I had been under a private tutor for some years I went to Germany for a couple of years, and then I came back home a young man.

I didn't see so much of Harry now, for he was up in London reading up at a crammer's for the army; but I often went over with my aunt to see the Squire,

and I saw a good deal of Katie, now grown up into quite a beautiful girl.

And then we fell in love. I don't think anybody guessed what was happening. We knew it first, and we didn't say anything to anybody. We didn't mention it for a long time to each other, but one day, when we had been for a long walk and a thunder-shower came on, and we stood up near an old ruin out of it, and the lightning was very vivid and the thunder very loud, and Katie clung to me in her terror, it all came out; and when the shower was over and the sky was blue again, and the birds were singing, we walked home together, our hearts almost too full to speak, and I was quite sorry when we came to the Hall and I had to say good-bye.

We had both got awfully wet in the shower without noticing it, and Katie was laid up. I was up at the Hall every day to know how she was, and I was terribly anxious until they told me that she would soon be able to leave her room and be about again.

I was so anxious that I was obliged to tell somebody of my secret, and I told it to my best friend, my more than mother, my dear old aunt.

I suppose the old lady was afraid that I should



want to be married straight off and leave her, for she looked quite frightened when I told her.

‘You are in love with—with Katie Mayfield?’ she said.

‘Yes, aunt, and she is in love with me, and we never mean to marry anybody else!’ I said.

She looked at me very earnestly—almost sorrowfully, I thought—and then she said gently :

‘Dick, if this is so, you must go to the Squire and ask his consent. You must do this before you see Katie again.’

‘Must I go to the Squire at once?’ I said.

‘At once,’ my aunt replied firmly. ‘There must be no misunderstanding. Go to the Squire now—this very afternoon—and say to him that you love Katie, and that you want to be engaged to her. Do you understand?’

‘Yes,’ I stammered. ‘I understand, but can’t I wait till I’ve seen Katie, and we’ve talked it over?’

‘No; you must go now!’

Suddenly I had an inspiration.

‘Aunty,’ I said, ‘can’t you go to the Squire? I’m sure you’d explain things so much better than I can.’

My aunt hesitated a moment. Then she said

slowly, as if speaking to herself, 'Yes, perhaps I'd better see the Squire first. It may save——' And then she hesitated, looked at me sadly, and went out of the room.

What was it that my aunt's interview might save? I began to feel anxious, nervous. Perhaps I was too poor; perhaps the Squire wanted Katie to marry some swell county magnate. I didn't know what to think.

I got up and put on my hat, and went out in the garden and lit my pipe, and strolled up and down just to quiet my nerves, and presently my aunt passed me, walking quickly.

'You are going to the Hall now?' I said.

'Yes, Dick, now.'

It seemed hours before my aunt returned. When she did come back, I thought she looked very grave.

Laying her hand gently on my arm, she said:

'Dick, you are to go to the Squire's this evening at eight. He will give you his answer himself.' Then, with a little cry, she stooped and put her arms round my neck and drew my face down to hers and kissed me. 'God bless you, Dick,' she said, 'and give you strength, and——'

And then before I could ask her what it all meant she was gone.

I dined alone that evening. My aunt sent word that she had a headache, and she kept her room.

'Poor aunty!' I said to myself, 'she is upset at the idea of my getting married.' I imagined she was grieving because she thought or knew that the Squire would refuse his consent to my engagement. The idea came into my mind, but I dismissed it. I have never been one to meet trouble half-way.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was alone in the library with the Squire. How my heart beat, how my lips trembled!

The Squire looked almost as grave as my aunt had done when he came into the library, into which I had been shown on my arrival.

'Well, Dick,' he said, 'you've something to say to me?'

'Yes, sir,' I stammered; 'I—er—thought my aunt had told you—that I—oh, sir, I and Katie love each other, and I come to ask if you—if you've any objection to our being engaged.'

The Squire looked at the ceiling earnestly for a

moment, then with a little cough he cleared his throat, and looked at me.

‘Dick,’ he said, ‘I like you very much, my lad, I respect and esteem you, and I think you are a real good fellow—I’m sure you’d make Katie a good husband; but, Dick, I’ve been talking the matter over with your aunt, and we’ve come to the conclusion that it is best that you should know something which has been kept from you all your life.’

The Squire said this so seriously that I grew alarmed. What was he going to tell me?

‘You see, Dick, you’ll have to know it sooner or later. You’ll have to know it before you ask any girl to be your wife. You’ve asked me for my daughter, and so it’s my duty, my painful duty, Dick, to tell you what I would much rather you learned from someone else. Your aunt agrees with me that you must know now. She would tell you if I didn’t, and I can at least spare her.’

‘Go on, sir, for God’s sake go on!’ I cried. ‘Whatever this terrible secret is—for terrible it must be—let me know it now.’

‘Dick,’ said the Squire, rising and standing before me, and taking my hand in his, ‘Dick, my dear

boy, what I am going to tell you is known only to your aunt and myself. No one else need ever know it now except yourself—and the woman you marry.'

'Is it—is it so very awful?' I gasped.

'Yes, it is awful; but you must be brave and bear it. Dick, your real name is not Linthorpe; Mrs. Linthorpe is not your aunt, she is only a distant relative of your father's. She took you and adopted you when you were left an orphan under most distressing circumstances. Dick, your father died a terrible death, and your mother was tried and convicted of his murder.'

For a moment I could hardly grasp the import of those awful words.

'My mother—a—murderess!' I groaned. 'No, you cannot mean it. It cannot be true.'

'Your mother, Dick,' said the Squire, his voice trembling with emotion, and the tears coming into his eyes, 'was convicted of the crime.'

'God have mercy on me!' I wailed in my despair. 'My father murdered! My mother his murderess!'

I could not even then grasp all that this terrible revelation meant.

The Squire tried to speak, but he could find no words to comfort me in my utter despair.

For a moment or two we sat in silence.

Then with an effort, for my limbs seemed like lead, I rose from the chair.

‘Squire!’ I said, ‘I understand that you were bound to tell me this. I wish that I had died before I knew it, but I suppose I should have learnt it some day. Good-bye, God bless you, Squire, for all your kindness to me! You—you will tell Katie—that you have refused your consent—don’t let her know why. I couldn’t bear to have her think of me as the son of a murderess—the son of a murderess who had been hanged.’

‘No, Dick, no!’ exclaimed the Squire, gripping my hand, ‘you were spared that, my poor boy; your mother lives still.’

‘Lives!’ I exclaimed; ‘my mother lives, and she is a convicted murderess? Oh, she was mad, that was it, wasn’t it—mad, and not responsible for her actions? Tell me, tell me all now, for I have a right to know.’

‘Your mother was convicted and condemned, but some people doubted her guilt, and at the last moment

the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.'

'And my mother is still—in prison, then?'

'Yes.'

I clasped the Squire's hand, muttered a few incoherent words, and turned away. He asked me to stay, but I could not trust myself. I wanted to be alone—to think of the terrible secret I had learned—to decide upon my future course.

\* \* \* \* \*

That evening I had a long and painful conversation with my aunt. I insisted upon her telling me everything—all that she knew herself—all that had been said and done at the time of the tragedy. I got the dates from her, and I determined at once to find the reports of the trial and study them. My mother was still alive. She had been for twenty years a prisoner, a convicted murderess. There must have been some doubts of her guilt or she would not have been respited. Thenceforth I had but one idea, one mission in life, to prove my mother's innocence, or satisfy myself beyond all doubt that she was guilty.

Before I bade my weeping aunt good-night, I asked her one question.

‘Tell me,’ I said, ‘you who have been as a mother to me—tell me, do you believe my mother was the guilty wretch this crime would make her?’

My aunt turned her head away and the tears flowed down her cheeks.

I understood that silent answer to my question. God help me, there was little hope for me now.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day I left my aunt's house and went to London, where I took apartments. I spent my nights and days in reading and re-reading the story of the tragedy that left me fatherless and motherless.

The story was a cruel one for a son to read. My father was a naval officer who had made what the world calls a *mésalliance*. He had married Marion Holt, a young girl whose name had been made notorious by her connection with an accomplished swindler. It was after her desertion by this man, who fled the country to escape from justice, that my father met Marion Holt, fell in love with her and, in spite of her past history, made her his wife. It was proved at the trial that he always spoke of his wife in the most affectionate terms, and had declared to his family that she was a woman who had been the victim



of a plausible scoundrel. At the trial, letters were put in from him which showed that for some years they had lived upon the most affectionate terms. One of his brother officers told the court that my father only a few weeks before his tragic death had declared that my mother was a noble woman, and that he had known nothing but happiness since he had married her.

The story of the murder was simple. On the 9th of November, 186—, my father, who had been absent on duty for some months, returned home. By some mischance, the letter sent to my mother, announcing the date of his arrival in England, had never reached her. On my father's arrival at home he knocked at the door, and, to his astonishment, it was opened by his wife herself. She appeared to be very much frightened, and in reply to his question explained that she didn't expect him, and that the servants had both had permission to go and see the illuminations for the Prince of Wales's birthday.

My father went in, and about five minutes afterwards the policeman on duty saw a man softly open the front-door and creep out stealthily. He closed the door so quietly that the constable's suspicions

were aroused, and he went after him, and caught him up under a lamp-post and stopped him, and asked him a question. The man gave a hurried and confused explanation, and the policeman was about to question him further, when he suddenly took to his heels and ran away.

The constable at once went back to the house and rang the bell, and was admitted by my father. He informed him of the circumstance, but my father assured him he must have been mistaken in the house, and my mother said the same, but the constable at the trial declared that the lady seemed to be very agitated.

The servants who were called at the trial swore that after the Captain's return my father and mother seemed much estranged—that their mistress was frequently in tears.

On the 21st of November my mother was proved to have gone to a chemist's some distance away, and to have purchased a preparation of arsenic. She gave a false name and address to the chemist's assistant, who entered the purchase in a book kept for the purpose.

On the evening of the 22nd witnesses who were

called at the trial proved that she had been seen some distance from her home talking earnestly with a man who answered the description of the man the police constable had seen leaving my father's house on the evening of the 9th.

On the night of the 22nd my parents retired to rest as usual, occupying different rooms, which they had done since their estrangement. The servant, who left them together in the sitting-room when she went to bed, heard them quarrelling, and deposed at the trial that she heard my father upbraiding my mother about 'that man,' and my mother was crying and protesting her innocence.

On the morning of the 23rd my father was found dead in his bed. On a little table by the side of his bed was an empty glass which at first was supposed to have contained simply cold water, which he was in the habit of drinking every night as a remedy for insomnia, from which he suffered. On a doctor being called in he at once detected symptoms of poisoning, and on examining a little liquid still left in the glass he discovered traces of arsenic.

My mother, who was in a terrible state of distress at my father's death, and almost beside herself with

grief and agitation, was eventually arrested and charged with having put the arsenic in the water for the purpose of causing my father's death.

The facts adduced against her were these : The secret purchase of arsenic, the quarrel with my father about the man she was proved to have been in the habit of meeting, and who was eventually proved to have been the swindler with whom she was formerly connected, and the evidence of the servant who slept in a room opposite my father, and who declared that about one o'clock in the morning, hearing footsteps on the landing, she opened the door a little way, and saw my mother leave my father's room stealthily and go downstairs to her own, which was on the lower floor.

The statement that my mother made before she was arrested was that she had purchased the arsenic with the intention of committing suicide in consequence of the persecution of the man, who had returned from penal servitude, and who was threatening to annoy her husband and create a scandal unless she left my father and returned to him. She declared that this persecution and my father's refusal to believe in her innocence had driven her almost mad, and then

the idea of taking her own life had come into her head. She confessed that she had met this man again and again, but it was for the purpose of pleading with him not to come between her and the husband she loved so devotedly.

On the night of her husband's death she had gone to her own room, and made up her mind to die that night. But she still hoped there might be some chance of reconciliation—that her husband would see how unjust his suspicions were; she made up her mind to tell him all—to tell him the secret she had vainly endeavoured to conceal from him—that this was the scoundrel to whose wiles she had once fallen a victim. She had feared to tell her husband that, lest it should only confirm his jealous suspicions.

Determining to risk this confession, she went upstairs, and, opening the door, gently spoke to my father; but receiving no answer, she thought he was asleep, and she went downstairs again, deciding to tell him all in the morning. In the morning he was dead.

This statement was, I found, generally received with incredulity. There was no evidence to back it up, and it in no way accounted for the arsenic which

my mother had purchased finding its way into the glass by my father's bedside. The man who had been the cause of the disaster was found and called as a witness. He admitted that my mother had met him, but denied that he had persecuted her. He declared that her meetings with him were voluntary, and he understood from her that she was anxious to leave her husband, who 'did not love her,' and return to him.

The theory of the prosecution was that my mother wilfully administered the poison to my father, by whose death she was left well off, and that she wished to be free to return to her old lover without losing the advantages my father's wealth conferred upon her. It was suggested that she had imagined that the death, if attributed to poison, would be put down to suicide.

A jury found my mother guilty, and she was sentenced according to the law. But the public were not satisfied : a great discussion arose, and eventually her sentence was commuted to lifelong imprisonment.

At the time of the tragedy I was in charge of an old servant of my father's who had married a farmer.

I was a weakly child, and my mother had sent me into the country for the benefit of my health. After the conviction I was taken by the good creature I have always called my aunt, and under another name was brought up by her as her nephew, and kept in entire ignorance of the dreadful fate of my parents.

When I had mastered all the details of the story of my mother's crime my heart sank within me. I still declined in my own heart to believe her guilty, but what hope could I have after the long lapse of years of getting the case re-opened and proving her innocence? My father undoubtedly died by the poison she herself had secretly purchased, and she was the last person in his room that fatal night.

Who else could have killed him? Who had any motive for such a terrible crime?

There was only one theory that seemed probable, and that was suicide. And if it was suicide, how could I hope to prove that now? The secret of that awful night was either locked away in my mother's heart or buried in my father's grave.

But I had set myself the task of trying to unravel the mystery, and to that, come what might, I determined to devote my life. Katie was lost to me for

ever. With this horrible stain upon my name I could never ask her to become my wife.

What could I do? who could help me? Whither could I turn in search of the information that might give me some clue to follow, however faint? In twenty years many of the witnesses might have died or left the country.

As soon as I had settled in my own mind what I would do, I made a complete list of the witnesses at the trial for future reference, and then I went to look for the house in which the tragedy had occurred.

I found it with difficulty, for the street had been renamed and the houses renumbered; but at last I succeeded in identifying it, and to my intense relief I found it was to let.

It was a quiet, respectable little ten-roomed house, one of a long row in a quiet road in Fulham.

My first step was to get possession of it. After a little bargaining I secured it for one year by paying an extra rental, and then I set about to make a thorough exploration of it. I succeeded after a great deal of trouble in discovering the servant who had slept in the house on the night of the murder. She was the wife of a greengrocer, and the mother of a



large family. I did not tell her who I was, but merely that I had taken the house and was anxious to know something of the story connected with it. She was kind enough to come with her husband to the house and point out the various rooms to me.

‘That’s where I slept that night, sir, and that’s the room the Captain slept in,’ she said, pointing out the apartments to me.

I encouraged her to talk of the mystery, but I got from her no more than I had read in the newspapers. She was convinced that the Captain had been poisoned by his wife. ‘I saw her stealing out of that room, sir, with my own eyes,’ she said, ‘and I shan’t forget the look that was on her face as long as I live. She’d done it then, you may depend on it.’

‘You never thought, I suppose, that the Captain might have taken the poison himself?’

‘Take it himself—why, where did he get it from? She bought it—he didn’t. She kept it till she wanted it. If he’d have bought any poison it would have come out, and if hers hadn’t been used she’d have said where it was, and it would have been found.’

‘Didn’t she say where she had put it?’

‘ Well, now you come to mention it, I remember she did say something. She said she’d put it away in a drawer in her room and locked it up. It was a drawer she used to keep her money in, and her trinkets and things, but there was nothing found there. It wasn’t likely, seeing she’d put it in the poor master’s drink that always stood at the side of his bed.’

‘ It wouldn’t have been possible, I suppose, for the Captain to have gone to the drawer for something, to have found the packet labelled “ Poison,” and to have taken it away and used it himself ?’

‘ I don’t see how that could have been, sir ; you see, the missus always kept that drawer locked, and had the keys herself. She had to give the police the keys before they could open it to search the drawer themselves. There was no arsenic found there by them, so she must have used it. She hadn’t poisoned herself, but she’d got rid of it in some way ; she said they’d find it there, but they didn’t.’

I gave the woman a couple of sovereigns for her information, and she went, wondering I dare say who on earth I could be to make so many inquiries about a murder that took place twenty years ago.

The house was empty ; it was a forlorn hope to search it. What could I find ? Yet I went all over it, searched in every nook and cranny. It was the sort of thing one does knowing that it is absurd.

I left the house that day sad and dejected. The housemaid's story was dead against my theory of suicide, and all in favour of the theory of the prosecution. The poison of which my father died must have been the poison my mother purchased and kept under lock and key.

A few days afterwards another idea occurred to me, and I went to see my mother's former housemaid again.

I wanted to know if, on the morning the murder was discovered, any trace of the paper in which the poison had been sold had been found in the room or anywhere about the house.

The reply was in the negative. It was supposed that my mother had destroyed the paper by flinging it in the fire which was burning at the time in the Captain's bedroom. There were the ends of charred paper in the grate and one little white corner of doubled paper, which might have been the end of the burnt packet.

I tried to look up some of the other witnesses, but failed to find them. The doctor was dead; the inspector who had charge of the case was dead. The only person I succeeded in finding was an old brother officer of my father's, now an old gentleman living at Southsea.

With him I had a long interview. And to him I revealed my identity. He expressed his deep sympathy with me, but sorrowfully shook his head when I asked him if there was any doubt of my mother's guilt.

I spent a long day with him, and tried to talk him into my theory of suicide. I was really only trying to convince myself.

Just as I was leaving he suddenly stopped me.

'One minute,' he said; 'something has just occurred to me—something which I had quite forgotten.'

'What is it?' I exclaimed eagerly.

'Nothing, I fear, that can be the slightest use to you. I attached no importance to it at the time, and it was only something you said a little time ago that has brought it back to my mind. I remember once hearing it said a long time after the trial, when we were talking over our poor old friend's sad death

aboard ship, that your father once asked our surgeon to give him some arsenic. I asked at the time what it was for, but I forget now.'

'And did the surgeon give it to him?'

'That we never knew. Our surgeon had been transferred to another ship, and had died in the West Indies before the trial took place.'

'Then if this arsenic was given him he might have had it in his possession.'

'He might. But, my poor boy, what is the use of worrying yourself with these theories now? Forgive me for saying it, but the unfortunate lady had a fair trial, and everything was done on her behalf. The evidence was damning, and if you will take an old man's advice you will let the matter rest. You can do her no good; you may do yourself a great deal of harm.'

That was the first inkling I had of any idea that my father could have had any arsenic in his possession.

But, as against that theory, there was the fact that the arsenic my mother had purchased had never been found or accounted for. I was but clutching at a straw like a drowning man.

At the end of three months I was no nearer than

when I began. No gleam of light came to pierce the dark night which enveloped the mystery of my father's death.

For as a mystery I persisted in regarding it.

I had abandoned all hope, and was thinking seriously of returning to bid my aunt farewell, and going off on a long journey to the end of the world, when one day on looking down the daily paper I came upon a name which I had reason to regard with the utmost horror and loathing.

It was the name of the man who had brought my mother's terrible fate upon her.

Harold Anson was not a common name, and this Harold Anson was mentioned as a man who had been mixed up in a *cause célèbre*—the murder of Captain —.

This man had been arrested for an assault upon his father, an old man known as 'the Shoreditch miser,' and reputed to be a wealthy man.

The circumstances as given in the papers were curious. The prisoner alleged that he had many years ago, fearing arrest, confided to his father's care a lot of valuable property—that he had been arrested and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, that

after his release he many times endeavoured to obtain possession of his property from his father, but the old man had refused to give it up. He had lately fallen on very bad times, and being in despair, he had gone to his father again, and after a violent quarrel had lost his temper and struck the old man, knocking him down, and intending to ransack the miserable room in which the old man lived.

The old man's cries had brought the police, and Harold Anson was given into custody.

I went to the police, and, after going to the proper authority, obtained an interview with Anson.

Mastering the loathing with which the sight of this man filled me, I asked him for information about the case in which he had been so closely concerned.

At first he was sullen.

I offered to make it worth his while to speak, and at last I obtained from him, on a solemn promise of substantial help, the extraordinary information that the property he had confided to his father twenty years ago was a bundle of bank-notes he had received from my mother—money she had given him to induce him to leave the country and abandon his persecution of her.

‘I gave the notes to the old wretch just as I had them from her,’ he said, ‘in the envelope in which she gave ’em to me, for I expected to be nabbed every minute, and dared not try to leave the country because they were after me over this blessed murder case, and he’s stuck to ’em ever since. He says he’s got the lot just as I gave ’em him, and I believe it, for he hoards everything, even to the pins and needles he picks up in the street, like the dotty old skinflint he is. He says it will all come back to me after his death, but I shan’t have ’em to squander now.’

An hour after I had extracted this information from Harold Anson, I was in the miser’s miserable room.

The old man was obstinate : he suspected a trap, and thought I was in league with his son ; but when I promised him that I would buy that packet for all it was worth and ten pounds over, the ruling passion of his life overcame his scruples.

‘I only opened this envelope,’ he said, ‘to see what was inside it. I’m honest. The notes ain’t been tampered with. If you give me twenty pounds more than there are there you can have ’em. That’s fair,



ain't it?—fair to me and to my son, because I'm only taking care of 'em for him.'

I agreed.

'Fetch the money,' he said; 'money down is my motto.'

I went home, drew a cheque on the London bank at which I had opened an account, and in two hours returned with two hundred pounds. I felt convinced that would more than cover the sum my mother had handed to her persecutor.

The old man kept his word, and after I had shown him my notes in readiness for the deal he went to an inner room, and presently returned with a yellow, dirty envelope, from which with trembling fingers he drew a folded packet of notes.

As he pulled them out and opened them a little paper packet fell on the floor.

I picked it up, and the room whirled round with me.

I did not wait to get the notes, I waited for nothing. Leaving the old man paralyzed with astonishment, and shrieking out that he had been robbed, I darted down the dirty staircase and out into the street.

My mother must have hurriedly taken from her

drawer that bundle of notes, kept there probably for an emergency, put there, perhaps, in readiness for the appointment with Anson, and in the notes had evidently slipped by accident the packet which had been in the same drawer.

I held in my hand a small packet labelled 'Arsenic—Poison,' and on it was the name of the chemist who swore that he had sold that arsenic to my mother on the 21st of November, 186—, twenty years ago.

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I will not enter into all the details of what followed after, or tell you the many difficulties I had to contend with to get my startling piece of evidence investigated by the authorities. But I succeeded. I succeeded in proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that my mother was innocent of my father's death, and that he had undoubtedly committed suicide. The belief that my mother had been faithless to him had, in all probability, affected his mind. I had the satisfaction a short time afterwards of entering the gloomy prison walls and saying to my mother, of whose existence even until a few short months previously I was unaware, that I, her son, had cleared her name, and had come to lead her out into the

world again a free woman, and a cruelly-wronged woman, for whom there was now nothing but love and pity and tender sympathy.

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Katie and I are married, and we live in a sweet little country nest in the quietest and sunniest corner of Devonshire. And there lives with us a gentle lady, her hair prematurely silvered, and her sweet face stamped with the traces of a great sorrow that can never be forgotten. But she says that in the love of her children—she looks on Katie as her daughter—Heaven has atoned to her for all the years of sorrow and shame she endured within the gloomy prison walls.

Aunt Linthorpe and the Colonel and Harry come to see us sometimes. We love our old friends, but we make no new ones. We are happy with each other, and for a time at least we are content to live our quiet, happy life, until the terrible tragedy which at one time threatened to cloud our lives for ever is forgotten.

## A TRAGIC HONEYMOON

My chamber-maid at the — Hotel, Scarborough, was a nice, motherly, middle-aged woman. I like motherly, middle-aged women for chamber-maids. They know their business better, and they answer the bell quicker than young, flighty chamber-maids. And they are not so fond of reading the letters you leave about you, and prying into your private affairs.

The bump of curiosity is strongly developed in some women, and you find striking examples of the length to which female curiosity will go in hotels, lodgings, and places where they let apartments.

I stayed for a fortnight once in private apartments in Broadstairs, and when I left I recommended them to a friend of mine. He took them later on in the season without saying that they had been recommended to him by anyone. The landlady was a gossip—the kind of landlady that comes in herself to

clear away the tea-things, and stands at the door for half an hour with the tray in her hand, while she tells you her trials and troubles, and throws in an anecdote or two concerning her former lodger.

I suffered considerably from this kind of landlady in my early days when hotels were beyond my means, and when I had to be content with two rooms in an unfashionable quarter.

It is only fair to say that in after-life I turned my sufferings to good account, and used up a lot of material that had been supplied by lodging-house-keepers.

My friend who took my old apartments at Broadstairs was full of his adventures when he met me again. He assured me that he had learnt more about me in one week than he had learnt in all the ten years he had known me. His informant was the landlady

She had furnished him with a full, true and particular account of a lodger she had had earlier in the season—a lodger who was always writing and walking up and down the room, and muttering to himself, and she had grave misgivings that he had a crime on his conscience, because one day she picked

up a sheet of paper he had left on the table, and it was all about a robbery or something. She fancied her lodger had begun to write a confession of what he had done, and then thought better of it, for she put the paper back, and the next day she found it all torn and 'scrobbled up' in the waste-paper basket. With an utter lack of consideration the landlady gave my real name, and furthermore furnished my friend with choice extracts from some of my private letters, and wound up by saying: 'I wonder what he could have been, sir; I'm sure there was something wrong about him.'

I have a friend, a celebrated novelist, whose housemaid for years read every letter that he left on his table, and a good many that he put away in the pigeon-holes of his desk, and when, in consequence of having stayed out till one o'clock in the morning on a bank holiday, she received notice, her temper got the better of her discretion, and she gave her astonished master a 'bit of her mind,' and referred to various matters which she could only have become acquainted with by a very close study of his correspondence.

Hotel servants are not so inquisitive as private servants and lodging-house servants. They have not

the same opportunity for minutely investigating; but even in hotels there are chamber-maids who want to know all about the guests, and who chatter among themselves concerning No. 157, No. 63, or No. 215, and speculate as to his profession, his financial position, and his moral qualities. Chamber-maids in large hotels have some curious experiences, and, as the records of the law courts plainly show, they are close observers, and are able months, sometimes years, afterwards to identify parties, and to favour the court with detailed statements worthy of a detective or a paid spy.

Let me hasten to remove the impression that I wish to be 'down' on chamber-maids. As a whole I look upon them as very worthy and decidedly useful members of the community. But I still prefer, when I am staying for any length of time at a hotel, to have a chamber-maid who has passed her first youth and settled down into a staid and matronly sort of person.

Such a chamber-maid was Agnes, who, a few years ago, when for some five days I had to keep my room at the — Hotel, Scarborough, showed me the greatest kindness and consideration, gave me my

medicine, and, like a good, kind-hearted woman, endeavoured to cheer me up and amuse me whenever she came in to tidy up the room, or to see how I was getting on, or to inquire if I wanted anything.

It was one morning while she was dusting my room that she told me the story which I am about to relate. I had been (not entirely without a view to copy) asking her questions as to her experiences as a chamber-maid, and after telling me one or two incidents in her professional career, she informed me that the most curious experience she had ever had in her life was while she was a chamber-maid at one of the big London hotels much frequented by people on their way to the Continent.

‘I’ve seen people arrested there,’ said Agnes, ‘nice, quiet people, that you would never have suspected of anything wrong; and I’ve seen runaway couples stopped just as they were coming downstairs to go off by the Continental mail. There’s always something or other happening in a big hotel, but of all the extraordinary affairs that ever came under my notice the most terrible was one that happened about a year before I left. I was the head-chamber-maid on the third floor then, and had, of course, to



look generally after all the rooms, and see that everything was right. One day we received a letter from the country, ordering a suite of rooms to be reserved for a newly-married couple on a certain date.

‘The bride and bridegroom were coming up to London on their way to spend their honeymoon abroad, and they would break the journey at our hotel, going on by the Continental train the next day.

‘The housekeeper came up to me with the letter, and gave me instructions to get a suite on my floor ready, and to see that everything was in proper order. The bridegroom had been a constant visitor at the hotel in his bachelor days, and the manager was anxious that everything should be made as comfortable for him and the young lady as possible.

‘As soon as I had received my orders I began to execute them, and I had the rooms thoroughly turned out, and everything dusted and rearranged. I put clean curtains at the windows, and womanlike, always feeling interested in bridals and honeymoons, I took extra pains to make the rooms look cheerful and pretty, and I think I succeeded.

‘The following evening, about an hour before the young couple were to arrive, I went in and gave a

last look round to see that everything was right, and just went over the mantelpiece myself with a duster and gave the furniture a flick here and there where the dust—that no power on earth can keep out of a London room—had settled down again.

‘Satisfied that everything was in perfect order, I closed the door and went to give some instructions to one of the girls about lighting a fire in a room at the end of the corridor, which was always a fearful nuisance to us when a fire was wanted in it. But so sure as we were full up, and that room had to be given to a visitor, the visitor would want a fire lit in it. It seemed just as if it was to be. It became a joke all over the hotel at last.

‘Whenever a message came up that No. 63 was let, we always used to say, “Of course there’s a fire wanted,” and, upon my word, it really always was so.

‘The girl whose business it was to light the fire passed me in the corridor.

“‘Oh,” I said to her, “I was coming to see you about No. 63. Be sure to have the window open and the door open when you light the fire.’

“‘I’ve got ’em open,” she said, “but the wind’s

the wrong way or something, and the fire won't light at all."

" "Oh, nonsense!" I said; "I'll come and see to it."

"We went back together and into the room. The gentleman who'd taken it was already there. He was standing with his hands in his pockets looking at the fireplace, and he seemed the picture of misery.

" "Poor young fellow!" I said to myself, "he looks ill and unhappy, and wants cheering up. This is not the sort of room to make him feel at home, any way."

" "If you could do without a fire, sir," I said, "it would be better. We always have a trouble with this fireplace. I am sorry to say it smokes."

" "I must have a fire," said the young gentleman. "If I can't have one here, give me another room."

" "I'm afraid we're full up, sir," I said; "but I'll go and see what can be done if you don't mind waiting a little."

"I really was sorry for the poor young gentleman, he looked so utterly wretched, and I couldn't bear to think of him, ill as he evidently was, shut up in that dreadful No. 63, half suffocated all night. There's nothing I think makes one feel so miserable as a

room full of smoke, especially when you're away from home and alone.

'Leaving the girl to struggle with the fire, I went downstairs to the housekeeper's room to see if there was a chance of putting the young gentleman anywhere else, if it was only for the night. As luck would have it, a telegram had just been received from a gentleman who was to have come from Scotland that night. He had missed his train, and wouldn't be in London till the following evening. The room reserved for him was on the fourth floor, immediately over the sitting-room on the third floor which we were keeping for the newly-married pair.

'Having obtained permission, I went back to the young gentleman in No. 63, and told him that if he did not mind we would give him a room on the fourth floor, No. 217, where he could have a fire and be comfortable. I explained to him, however, that he would have to be moved on the following day if he intended staying on.

" "Thank you very much," he said; "that will do very well. I shall not want the room after to-morrow."

'I called one of the porters and told him to take

the gentleman's portmanteau up to 217, and then I went to the chamber-maid for the fourth floor, and asked her to get a fire lighted at once.

‘When I came downstairs the newly married couple had just arrived, and were being shown to their rooms.

‘I took in the warm water myself, and had an opportunity of seeing the young lady. She was very pretty, I thought, and she looked quite a picture in her lovely travelling dress.

‘The bridegroom was a tall, handsome gentleman, but much older than the young lady. I'd seen him several times at the hotel, and so, of course, I knew him. I should say he was about forty-five, and she couldn't have been more than nineteen. It was about seven o'clock when they came, and they ordered dinner for eight o'clock. Of course it was known among all the servants on the floor that they were a newly-married couple. It would have been even if we hadn't been told beforehand.

‘You can trust hotel servants for knowing a honeymoon when they see one. Plenty of brides and bridegrooms like to pretend that they've been married ever so long, especially at the very first, but they

never deceive *us*. I remember a private sitting-room waiter telling me a story of a newly-married couple once, who, when he went into the sitting-room at breakfast time, began to talk to each other in a way to make him believe they'd been married for years. But when the young lady was pouring out the tea, and said to her husband, "How many lumps of sugar do you take, dear?" he had all his work to prevent himself from grinning. He did smile, and the poor young things went quite scarlet both of them, and he went out of the room and had a good laugh all to himself in the service-room, and, of course, told it to everybody as a good joke. Men have no sympathy with young married people; they're not like women-folk in these matters.

'Of course I had no opportunity of seeing the bride and bridegroom again for some time. But the sitting-room waiter told us they seemed nice people, and the young lady was full of spirits.

'I went downstairs to supper at ten o'clock, and was back on duty again soon after ten-thirty. I had one or two things to see to, and when I had finished I sat down to do a little needlework.

'It must have been nearly eleven o'clock, when a

bell rang violently. The waiter for the floor had gone downstairs for his supper, so I went into the service-room and saw that it was the sitting-room bell of the bride and bridegroom. While I was looking at the indicator, the bell rang again, this time more violently still. I ran along the corridor to the room and knocked at the door.

“Come in! come in!” cried a man’s voice, and I went in, and there I saw the poor young bride in a chair and her husband bending over her.

“Some water, quick!” he cried. “She’s fainted.”

“I ran into the bedroom and brought some water and a towel, and bathed her face.

“Is anything the matter, sir?” I said.

“Yes!” he exclaimed, “it’s terrible. I wouldn’t have had such a thing happen for the world. Look, don’t you see?”

“He pointed to her hands, where they lay quite helpless in her lap.

“On one hand—the hand that wore the wedding-ring—was a big, bright drop of blood. It had fallen right on the wedding-ring, and stained her hand as well.

““Oh dear!” I cried, feeling quite faint myself, “what is it?”

““I don’t know,” he said; “I can’t understand it. It’s the most awful thing I ever knew in my life.”

‘He seemed quite terrified himself, and certainly it was a dreadful thing, especially to anybody who was at all superstitious or who believed in omens.

‘I took the towel, and dipped it in the water and wiped the blood-stain from the poor young lady’s hand. Presently she opened her eyes and looked about her.

““Are you better, my darling?” her husband said, stooping over her, and touching her forehead with his lips.

““Yes, I’m better, dear,” she said; “but it was so dreadful! Oh, what does it mean? what does it mean?”

‘She glanced down at her hand with a look of horror in her eyes, and when she saw that the blood had been removed she gave a deep sigh of relief.

‘Seeing she was a little better, I got up off my knees—I had been kneeling beside her—and went back into the bedroom with the water.



‘I was a little bit dazed myself, for I couldn’t understand how that drop of bright red blood could have got on the poor dear’s hand.

‘I was just putting the tumbler down on the washstand, when I heard a shriek from the bride, followed by a cry from the bridegroom. I ran back into the sitting-room, and there I found them both standing with terrified faces.

‘They couldn’t speak, but the bridegroom pointed to his wife’s hand.

‘It was stained with blood again.

‘“It has dropped upon her hand—this moment!” cried the gentleman. “I saw it, I saw it—with my own eyes!”

‘“Dropped!” I exclaimed; “where—where from?”

‘I saw the gentleman look up at the ceiling; my eyes followed his, and then I felt as if I should go through the floor. On the ceiling above was a dark moist patch, and slowly dripping from it were drops of blood.

‘“I can’t stop here,” wailed the poor young bride. “Take me away, take me away!”

‘“My dear young lady,” I said, trying to soothe her, “don’t be frightened; nothing can hurt you here.”

‘I don’t know why I said it, but I felt I must say something.

‘The gentleman’s face was very pale, and I could see he was trembling. He was terribly upset, and who could wonder at it?

‘I think he guessed that something awful had happened up above. I did, and it had come upon me all at once who was in that room. It was the young gentleman who had looked so ill and miserable, and who had wanted a fire in 63.

‘“Take her in the next room, sir,” I whispered. “She won’t see it there, and I’ll go and find out what it means.”

‘“No, no,” she cried. “I can’t—I won’t stay here! Oh, it is too horrible, and on my wedding-day—on my wedding-day!”

‘She wrung her hands, and then put them over her face.

‘And there on her hand—the hand with the wedding-ring—was still that terrible blood-stain.

‘I could not stand it any longer. I felt as if I should go off myself, so I made a desperate effort and got out of the room, and ran downstairs to the manager.

“ ‘Something dreadful’s happened, sir, and it’s in No. 217. Please go at once. There’s blood dripping through the ceiling of No. 13.’ ”

“ ‘Good heavens !’ exclaimed the manager. “What do you mean ?”

‘He was at supper when I told him, and he started up quite horrified.

“ ‘Please come at once, sir. The poor young lady’s seen it, and she’s in a terrible way.’ ”

‘The manager went up the stairs at once, and I followed him as fast as I could. On the first floor he met one of the porters, and he told him to come with us, and we all three went up on to the fourth floor, and the manager went straight to No. 217 and knocked at the door.

‘There was no answer.

‘The chamber-maid on the floor had come up, seeing something was the matter, and she gave the manager her master-key.

‘He put it in the door and turned it, but the door did not open.

‘It was bolted on the inside.

“ ‘Go and get something at once,” the manager said to the porter ; “ we must break the door open.”

‘It seemed an hour while we waited outside that door for the man to fetch his tools.

‘“You’re sure it’s blood?” the manager said to me.

‘“Oh yes, sir; I could see it by the stain on the ceiling, and some of it had dropped on to the young lady’s hand.”

‘“What an awful thing!” he exclaimed. “Who’s in here—do you know?”

‘“Yes, sir. It’s a young gentleman who came this afternoon, and we put him into 63 first, and moved him up here because of the smoke. He would have a fire!”

‘“I’m afraid it’s a case of suicide.”

‘“It’s something dreadful, sir, I’m sure, or the blood couldn’t have soaked through like that.”

‘Presently the porter came back, but it was a long job and a hard job to get that door open, the bolt held so firmly; but at last it went with a terrific crash, and then we all stood outside and peered into the room.

‘There was no light, but the fire was still burning brightly, and by the glow it cast over the room we saw something was lying on the floor.

‘The chamber-maid brought a light, and the manager went in first and knelt down by the “something.”

‘He had sent for the doctor directly I’d told him about the blood, and at that moment the doctor came up with the sub-manager.

‘The doctor went in and looked at the body while the light was held up for him.

‘“He’s dead,” he said, and the words almost made my heart stand still, though I had expected them.

‘The poor young fellow had gashed his throat in a frightful way, and was lying in a pool of blood on the floor.

‘I was in the room while they examined the body, but I couldn’t look at it. I turned my back and looked at the fireplace. There was a lot of burnt paper on the hearth, and some bits of torn-up letters and envelopes that hadn’t fallen into the fire.

‘The young fellow had been burning his letters and papers.

‘I knew then why he was so particular about having a fire in his room.

‘The doctor finished his examination, and then he got up and turned to the manager.

‘“It’s a case of suicide,” he said. “Do you know anything about him?”

‘“No; we’ve never seen him before; he only came this afternoon.”

‘“Well, you’d better not let anything be touched to-night. Nothing can be done for him. You’ll send for the police at once?”

‘“Of course.”

‘“Then, until they come you’d better lock up the room, and leave everything as it is. I’ll come down and sit in your room and wait for the police if you like.”

‘“Yes,” said the manager, “that will be best. I’ve been here ten years, and this is the first case of suicide we’ve had in the hotel.”

‘As soon as we were all outside, the manager pulled the door to, but it wouldn’t lock. He had forgotten that it had been burst open.

‘“I see,” said the doctor, “you can’t lock it up. You’d better put a man outside, then, to see that nobody goes in. He must remain there till the police come.”

‘So the porter was put on guard outside, and we all went along the corridor, looking very scared and frightened, as you can imagine, except the doctor, and of course doctors never look scared at anything—they take it all as a matter of business.

‘I had been so horrified at seeing the young fellow lying there dead that everything else had gone out of my head ; but when we got to the top of the stairs I remembered the young lady, and all at once I thought perhaps it would be only right if the doctor were to see her.

‘I spoke to the manager, and he turned to the doctor at once.

‘“ Doctor,” he said, “ there are very painful circumstances connected with this unhappy business. It seems, at least so the chamber-maid tells me, that blood must have dropped through into the room below.”

‘“ I don’t wonder at that,” said the doctor ; “ there’s quite a pool on the floor.”

‘“ Unfortunately, the room below is occupied by a newly-married couple, and the blood has fallen on the young lady. The chamber-maid tells me she is

terribly upset. I think, perhaps, you had better see her."

"Certainly I will, but I don't think, under the circumstances, it will be advisable to tell her the truth."

"No, not if you can help it."

"I'll see how she is, and try to reassure her, somehow. Where is she?"

"I'll take you to her," I said. "The poor young lady fainted, and I left her almost beside herself; and no wonder, for the blood was on her hands."

"Dear me!" said the doctor, his face looking quite grave; "and on her wedding-night, too. Poor thing! why, it's enough to turn her brain."

"I led the way to No. 13 and knocked at the door, and without waiting for an answer, opened it and said: "If you please, sir, here's our doctor, in case the young lady would like to see him."

"Then I pulled the door to again, for I had had enough of horrors, and went to sit in the service-room with two of the waiters.

"I wanted to be with somebody, for I felt too upset and nervous to be alone.

"The waiters were full of it, as anything of that



sort soon goes all over a hotel, and they wanted to know all about it, but I said I couldn't talk of it, it had upset me too much; but I told them there was no doubt that the young fellow in No. 217 had killed himself, and that he was quite dead.

'The doctor was with the young lady quite half an hour. He passed me on his way downstairs, and I asked him how she was, and if there was anything I could do.

"She's a little better now," he said, "but, of course, very much upset. I've persuaded her that it is only someone who has met with an accident and lost a quantity of blood, and although it was a very unpleasant experience, there is nothing for her to take to heart, or to be alarmed at; but I called the husband on one side and told him the truth, and he thinks it better they should go to another hotel."

"Well, sir," I said, "under the circumstances it will be, perhaps. It would be a dreadful thing for her to know that at the very beginning of her married life there was a suicide's body lying above her."

"Yes, that's a woman's way of looking at it, no doubt. You can go if you like and see if you can help them to pack and put their things together.

I'm going to ask the manager to send out and get them rooms in another hotel, so that they have no bother."

'I could see that the doctor was really sorry for the poor bride and bridegroom, and who could help being, under the circumstances ?

'I went in and helped to pack the things they had unpacked, and they were very grateful. I could see they were both awfully shocked and worried, and hardly knew what they were doing.

'Presently the manager came up and said he had got rooms for them at another hotel near, and we got all the luggage down and put it on a cab, and then they came down and drove away.

'It was past midnight when they went, and as I watched them going down the great staircase, the poor girl trembling and holding on to her husband's arm for support, and he as white as a ghost, I couldn't help thinking myself that it was about as unhappy a beginning to a honeymoon as their worst enemy, if they had one, could have wished for them.

\* \* \* \* \*

'Of course the police were very soon in the hotel, and had taken possession of the room where the

suicide lay. I didn't hear anything more that night, for I was tired out and upset, and glad to go to bed when it came to my turn to go off duty; and the next morning when I got up I heard the body had been taken away in the night to the mortuary, and that an inquest was to be held on it.

'Of course I was called at the inquest to give my evidence, and it was then I heard all about the poor young gentleman.

'His friends had been found and communicated with, and it seems that the young gentleman had been disappointed in love, and had been very strange in his manner, and very desponding for some time, but nobody thought he meant to kill himself.

'His brother, who was one of the witnesses, stated that he had been in love with a young lady who had not returned his affection, and this young lady had recently married, and that seemed to have preyed upon his mind very much. "In fact," said the brother, "he killed himself on the very day that the marriage took place."

'A good deal of evidence was given by the doctor and others, and the jury brought in a verdict of temporary insanity.

‘After the case was over I saw our manager go away with the brother, and they were talking together. Of course I went back to the hotel, but all day I couldn’t help thinking things over, and I thought to myself how strange it was that he should have killed himself right over the room in which there *was* a young lady who had only been married that day.

‘That evening when I went downstairs, the manager called me into his office and said he wanted to ask me a question or two.

“ ‘When that poor fellow came to the hotel, did he ask any questions of you?’ he said. ‘Did he mention any names, and ask if they were in the hotel or coming to the hotel?’”

“ ‘No, sir,’ I said; ‘he only asked for a fire.’”

“ ‘It was your idea to put him in the room above—217?’”

“ ‘Yes, sir. I did it because 63 smoked so badly.’”

“ ‘Well, it’s rather an odd coincidence, then. Do you know that he came to this hotel because the young lady he was in love with was coming to stay here with her husband. He had found out somehow they were coming here after the marriage.’”

“ ‘Good gracious, sir!’ I exclaimed, beginning to

see what the manager meant, "you don't mean to say that the young lady in 13 was the one he wanted to marry?"

"Yes, there is no doubt, from what the brother has told me, that it is so."

"And I had put him, quite by accident, in the room above the bride and bridegroom. Only one thin floor separated him from the girl he had broken his heart over, and on her bridal night, while he lay a corpse above her, his blood had dripped through and had fallen on her hands and stained her wedding-ring.

"He had doubtless timed his suicide. He had intended to take his life upon her wedding-day, and in the building in which she was to pass the first hours of her married life with the husband of her choice.

"But I am sure he did not know when he planned that terrible tragedy that she would be the first to see his life-blood flow—that her cry of horror would be the first thing to lead to the discovery of his terrible fate.

"It was chance that had brought that about—coincidence, as the manager called it—and I had been the innocent means of bringing it to pass.

‘I don’t know whether the poor bride ever learned the truth. I hope she didn’t, for it isn’t the sort of thing a woman would ever be able to forget. If she had known the truth that night when she felt a cold, wet splash, and looked at her wedding-ring—but there, it isn’t a thing to think about, is it, sir?’

I said that I didn’t think it was; but after Agnes had finished her story and left me to myself I thought a good deal about it, and it has remained upon the tablets of my memory until now.

In one thing I cordially agree with Agnes, that it was a strange experience for a chamber-maid. I doubt if many chamber-maids have had a stranger.

## ABSOLUTE DISCRETION

‘SPYERS AND Co. Private inquiry agents. A large staff of experienced detectives, male and female. Suspected persons watched. Confidential inquiries of all kinds undertaken. Absolute discretion.’

Day after day the above advertisement appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, and day after day ‘Spyers and Co.’ sat in their little office on the third floor of a house in Westminster and waited for their absolute discretion to be put to the test.

Where the large staff of experienced detectives, male and female, were concealed was a mystery. Spyers and Co. only had two small rooms as offices—one was the private office, and the other was a ‘clerks’ office,’ but there was nothing in the clerks’ office but a desk, two old second-hand chairs, a dilapidated umbrella-stand, and a map of London, yellow with age, and absolutely out of date.

It is possible that the large staff of male and female detectives were kept in the coal cellars as a means of preservation, or it may have been the custom of the firm to leave its staff outside in the street all day and give them instructions by a code of signals from the window.

These are professional matters into which it is not perhaps advisable to inquire too closely. Such eminent detectives as Spyers and Co. would naturally take especial pains to prevent their staff learning too much of their business, and overhearing too much of their conversation. It would be necessary to do this in order to ensure that absolute discretion which is the proud watchword and prominently advertised trade-mark of the firm.

Merit does not always succeed in this world, and in spite of their superior qualifications and their 'absolute discretion,' Messrs. Spyers and Co. found themselves after three months' partnership in anything but an enviable position. The rent of the offices was overdue, Mr. Spyers' overcoat was beginning to show signs of wear, his boots were going over at the heels, and he found considerable difficulty in arranging with Mrs. Spyers the petty details of their suburban



housekeeping. He began to regret that he had ever been tempted to leave his old employers, a flourishing firm of inquiry agents at the West End, and start in business for himself with the Co.

The 'Co.' was Mr. Wilkins, a young fellow of five or six and twenty, who had been a solicitor's clerk, and who, having been dismissed for revealing professional secrets to a 'newspaper man' in search of paragraphs, had invested his savings, some fifty pounds, in a partnership with Mr. Spyers. Spyers and Wilkins had been in the habit of using the same public-house of an evening, and there they had struck up an acquaintance which eventually led to the taking of the two little rooms, and the insertion in the daily papers of the advertisement which appears at the commencement of this narrative.

And now after three weary months of mingled hope and despair, Mr. Spyers and Mr. Wilkins, both at the end of their resources, were smoking their pipes in their private office, scowling at each other, cursing fate, and wondering what they could do to put a little money in their painfully empty pockets.

'We must do something, Wilkins!' exclaimed Mr. Spyers; 'we can't go on like this, you know.'

‘You needn’t tell me that,’ growled Mr. Wilkins. ‘I can’t help thinking, Spyers, that you’ve treated me badly in this matter.’

‘How?’

‘Well, confound it all! you don’t think I’d have given you fifty pounds to furnish this den and advertise in the papers if I hadn’t been led to believe that you had a connection. After all, I found the money.’

‘And I found the brains.’

‘Brains are no good if we haven’t any clients. That’s what you were to find.’

‘Clients will come if we wait.’

‘Quarter-day has come, and the landlord won’t wait. Spyers, old chap, I don’t think this is a particularly good game.’

‘Lots of men make money at it.’

‘Well, if they do they must be cleverer than we are.’

‘No, luckier! I’ll back myself against any detective in London to work a case when I get it. If you can’t get it, what are you to do?’

Mr. Wilkins looked steadily at Mr. Spyers for a moment, and then, putting his pipe down, he said quietly: ‘Make it!’

‘Eh?’ exclaimed Spyers, ‘make it—what do you mean?’

‘Look here, Spyers, I’ve been thinking over this affair a good deal lately, for I’ve seen ruin staring us in the face, and I’ve come to one conclusion.’

‘And that is?’

‘That we are a couple of darned fools.’

‘Speak for yourself,’ said Spyers haughtily.

‘Sorry to hurt your feelings, old chap, but it’s a fact. When cases haven’t come to us we ought to have gone to cases. We’ve been too respectable, too modest; and it’s time to try the other tack.’

‘What do you propose to do?’

‘To get a bit to go on with. You know why I got the bullet from Clark and Co., don’t you?’

‘Yes; you were overheard talking in a public-house about the Delbec Divorce Case before the petition was filed.’

‘Exactly. I now propose that we take the Delbec case up again.’

‘But nothing more has been heard of it. The wife never filed the petition.’

‘Quite so; there must have been a reason. What we want to find out is what that reason was. I saw

enough of the correspondence while I was in Clark's office, and I heard enough to know that there is a mystery about this case, and I think it will pay us to find it out—at any rate, there can be no harm in trying. I can easily find out from a pal of mine in the office what has happened since I left, and then we can start on the job at once.'

Mr. Spyers thought a minute, and then he said, 'What makes you think there is any money in it, Wilkins?'

'This. Delbec is a rich man and a well-known man, and the marriage with this woman was a secret one. He himself has never divulged it, and the world still believes him to be unmarried. There must be a reason for all this secrecy on his side, and there must be a reason for the sudden cessation of divorce proceedings on the part of the mysterious wife. Most secrets in which a lady is concerned are gold-mines if you only dig deep enough. I'm in hopes "the Delbec" may turn out a great deal more profitable than some of the mines which have lately been foisted upon a confiding public.'

\* \* \* \* \*

A week after this interesting conversation had taken

place between the members of the firm of Spyers and Co., Mr. Wilkins had, thanks to his former friend and fellow-clerk, succeeded in bringing his information with regard to the Delbec case 'up to date,' and having this information in their possession, the partners had decided upon playing a little comedy, and had thoroughly rehearsed it.

Mr. Delbec was a member of Parliament, a man of about fifty, who enjoyed considerable reputation as a social reformer, and was in great request as a speaker at suburban meetings, and a favourite chairman at penny readings. He was an eminently respectable man, and was generally credited with serious views and an unblemished reputation.

There had been rumours and hints of a skeleton in his cupboard, but as nothing definite was forthcoming on the subject, these rumours had gradually been dismissed as inventions of the enemy, and eventually had been forgotten.

During the Parliamentary Session Mr. Delbec occupied a flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, Westminster, and thither one morning Mr. Wilkins wended his way.

To insure himself a reception, he had on the

previous evening written Mr. Delbec the following letter :

‘SIR,

‘Some information of a peculiar kind, with regard to a matter of great importance to yourself, has lately come to my knowledge. I will call upon you to-morrow morning, and shall be glad if you can accord me an interview.

‘Faithfully yours,

‘WILLIAM WILKINS

‘(Private Detective).’

This letter had the desired effect. On handing his card to the servant, Mr. Wilkins was at once ushered into a room and informed that Mr. Delbec would see him at once.

Mr. Wilkins was not kept waiting very long. He had barely time to take out his pocket-book and glance over his notes to refresh his memory on certain points before Mr. Delbec entered the room.

‘Now, sir,’ said the M.P., settling himself into a chair, with his back to the window and taking a good look at his visitor, ‘you are, I presume, the gentle-

man who wrote me a letter signed William Wilkins, which I received this morning ?’

‘ I am, sir.’

‘ Very good. You say that you have information which is of importance to me. Pardon me if I put it plainly. Have you come to give me this information, or to sell it me ?’

Mr. Wilkins smiled.

‘ I see that you are a man of the world, Mr. Delbec, and a man of business. I will confess candidly that my reason in calling on you is that I believe I can be of service to you. Naturally, if you avail yourself of my services I shall expect to be paid for them. That is how I get my living.’

‘ Good ; now we understand each other. What is your information ?’

‘ Read that,’ said the detective, and he handed over to Mr. Delbec a letter which had evidently been in his pocket for some days. The address at the top and the signature had been carefully cut away. ‘ You will understand, sir, when you read the letter, why I have removed the name and address.’

Mr. Delbec read the letter, and it evidently made

him very angry, for his face flushed, and when he had finished it he flung it on the table.

‘This is an infamous business!’ he exclaimed.  
‘What does it mean?’

The detective rose and took up the letter again.

‘It means, sir, that the writer of that letter has instructed me to find out certain particulars concerning your private life. I didn’t like it, sir. I felt it was not like what we call a clean job, and I thought I would come to you and let you know what was going on behind your back.’

The M.P. looked hard at the detective.

‘I don’t quite understand your motive now,’ he said. ‘You are betraying your client, you know.’

‘Oh no, I’m not. I wrote at once and declined the job. I said it was not in my line, and it is not.’

‘Well,’ said the M.P., ‘it is certainly a very disgraceful thing. It is a monstrous thing that a man can be followed and his private affairs spied into like this. By heaven! if I find anybody following me about, I’ll go to a magistrate. Can you tell me what it means?’

‘Can’t you guess?’

Mr. Delbec hesitated before he answered.



‘It isn’t a matter for guessing,’ he said presently. ‘I want to know for certain.’

‘Then I can tell you, for before coming to you I looked into the matter and acquired certain information. The writer of this letter is a solicitor. He is a solicitor for a lady who has described herself as your wife, and has instructed him to obtain certain particulars in order that she may commence proceedings for divorce against you.’

Something very like an oath escaped the lips of the social reformer.

‘She can’t do it!’ he exclaimed, rising and pacing the room. ‘She can’t do it; she threatened a year ago, and it never came to anything.’

‘Then you are married! Come, sir, if I am going to take this case up for you, and protect your interests, you must give me your entire confidence.’

‘And if I don’t——’

‘Well, it won’t make very much difference, because I know that you are married. Acting in your interests, sir, I ascertained exactly what had been done. The lady has given her solicitor proof of your marriage to her. Now, as you are married to this lady, all I want to know is whether you mean to let

her file her petition, or whether you would like to prevent it.'

'Of course I should prefer to prevent it,' replied the M.P. 'I don't particularly care about its being known that I married this lady. I made a fool of myself, or, rather, she made a fool of me. I discovered that she wasn't exactly the sort of person a man in my position ought to have married. I found out certain things which made me very uncomfortable long before the honeymoon was over.'

'It was a secret marriage, then?'

'Yes. I tell you I made a fool of myself. Before I knew where I was I found that I had fallen into the toils of a very dangerous young woman, and fearing a scandal, a breach of promise, and all that sort of thing, I consented to a secret marriage, and we went abroad immediately afterwards. Abroad I found out certain facts with regard to her past career which were not particularly flattering to my *amour propre*, and discovered that we were not likely to lead a happy life together, and so we agreed to separate. I undertook to make her an allowance, and I have done so. Since then she has sent me several threatening letters, and a year ago I understood she

instructed a solicitor to commence proceedings for divorce on some ground or other ; but hearing no more of it, I fancied she had thought better of it. Now you say she is going on with the matter ?

‘ Certainly. The letter I have shown you should convince you of that. Her solicitor is employing detectives to make her case a good one.’

‘ But you have declined to act.’

‘ Yes ; and so the case has been given to another man.’

‘ Ah ! do you know that ?’

‘ Yes ; the man who has it in hand is a private detective named Spyers.’

‘ You are sure ?’

‘ Yes ; he was a partner of mine once. We quarrelled and separated. There is a bitter professional jealousy at the bottom of my coming to you, sir. I should like to checkmate this man Spyers, for he behaved very badly to me.’

‘ How can you checkmate him ? Besides, there is nothing for him to find out ; the charge against me is absurd.’

‘ There is a lady’s name mentioned in this letter, sir.’

‘Yes; but it is monstrous to mix her up in an affair of this sort. It is scandalous. She is a lady I haven’t seen for years—certainly not since I made this unfortunate marriage.’

‘Then, you don’t mind the case going on. You can defend it.’

‘Well, candidly, I would rather the case did not go on. Of course this woman would lose, but a divorce case is always unpleasant, and I don’t relish the idea of being mixed up in one.’

‘Then, let me stop it.’

‘How?’

‘Leave that to me. If you employ me to act in your interests, I think I can silence the lady.’

‘You know something?’

‘I know nothing, but I think there is something to be found out. Come, what would you give to have the case stopped?’

‘Five hundred pounds.’

‘Very good, sir, that’s a bargain. In the meantime I suppose you won’t object to pay expenses out of pocket?’

‘Certainly not. What do you want?’

‘Fifty pounds on account.’

Mr. Delbec went into another room and presently returned with a cheque in his hand.

‘There is the fifty pounds.’

‘Thank you, sir. If you will allow me I will give you a receipt.’

Mr. Wilkins drew out a receipt and handed it to his employer.

‘One word, sir. The lady mentioned in this letter—where does she live?’

‘Why do you want to know?’

‘Because my first task will be to find out what the other side is doing. If I know the address I can find out if her residence is watched.’

Mr. Delbec gave the address. Mr. Wilkins noted it down, and a few minutes later bade his employer good-morning, promising to report progress within a day or two.

Outside the mansion Mr. Wilkins hailed a cab, and told the cabman to drive him to the bank on which the cheque was payable. He cashed the cheque and then drove to the Mansion House. Then he dismissed the cab, and, turning up a side street, made his way to a public-house and walked into the private bar.

Mr. Spyers was already there.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Spyers, ‘what luck?’

‘He’s all right,’ replied Mr. Wilkins. ‘I’ve got thirty pounds down, and I’m to have three hundred if I stop the petition being filed. There’s your half.’

And Mr. Wilkins carefully counted out fifteen sovereigns, which he handed to his partner.

‘What’s to be done?’ asked Mr. Spyers, as he pocketed the gold.

‘You’d better go and work the wife. Here’s the information she wants.’

He showed Mr. Spyers his note-book, and Mr. Spyers copied the address which Mr. Delbec had given.

‘Anything to be done *there*?’ asked Mr. Spyers.

‘No; I don’t think so. He says he hasn’t seen her since he married, and I expect it’s true. I think he’d have told me if there was anything in it.’

‘All right,’ said Spyers. ‘Then I’ll go to business to-night. I suppose Mrs. D. is there?’

‘Oh yes; that’s where she writes to the solicitor from. My pal in the office took her address from the letter-book.’

‘I suppose she’ll see me?’

‘If you work it properly, of course she will ; but, to make sure, I’d better write you a letter, like you wrote to me to show Delbec. It makes it look genuine.’

Mr. Wilkins called for a pen and ink and a sheet of paper, and wrote as follows :

‘SIR,

‘I am anxious to obtain all the information I can with regard to a lady calling herself Mrs. Delbec, who is living at —, Brussels. Can you have her kept under observation for a week, and also find out for me the particulars of her past life? If you can undertake the case, call here, and I will give you what information we have about her.’

The letter written, he carefully cut off the top corner where the address would have been, and the bottom corner where the signature would have been, and then handed it to his partner, who put it in his pocket and went off to his suburban residence to pack his bag and prepare for his trip to the Continent.

Three days afterwards Mr. Wilkins repaired to his partner’s residence to hear the result of the journey.

Mr. Spyers was jubilant.

The lady had received him, had listened to his story, had read the letter, had betrayed considerable agitation, had thanked Mr. Spyers for his information, and enlisted his services on her behalf. The comedy had been played with her as it had been with Mr. Delbec, and she had confided to Mr. Spyers certain details invaluable to the other side.

‘I had a long talk with her, Wilkins,’ said Mr. Spyers, ‘and it’s evident she don’t want her past gone into, and this divorce business is only bounce to make old Delbec part a little more handsomely, and, I tell you what, I think we can do ourselves a good turn and behave handsomely and honestly to our clients as well.’

‘Well, let’s be honest if we can,’ said Mr. Wilkins, and he meant it. ‘If we *can* go straight, the three hundred pounds, too, all the better.’

‘We can, my boy ; and that’s the advantage of our acting together for both parties. Delbec will give you three hundred pounds to stop the proceedings, and I think I can find out enough about the lady to show her that it won’t be wise for her to go on, and perhaps get a bit extra for her, too, out of her husband. If we do this you’ll have earned your



money and I shall have earned mine. If I can get her another two hundred pounds a year, she'll give me two hundred pounds for myself, I should think, and that'll be five hundred pounds between us, and our expenses as well; and business always leads to business, and we shall have made a good start.'

In pursuance of their plans the two partners set to work, Mr. Wilkins making various alarming reports to Mr. Delbec of the awful things Mrs. Delbec was going to put in her petition, and the inquiries she was having made, and Mr. Spyers tracing back various details of the lady's past, and informing her that this was what the detective employed by Mr. Delbec was reporting to his employer.

Mr. Spyers ascertained quite enough about Mrs. Delbec's former vagaries to make the witness-box anything but a bed of roses for her, and Mr. Wilkins drove Mr. Delbec nearly mad by assuring him that wherever he went he was watched, and the whole of his proceedings reported to the solicitor for the opposite side.

'It's an infamy!' yelled the unfortunate M.P. 'There's no man living who would not resent such a system of espionage. It must be stopped.'

‘It shall be stopped, my dear sir. I am foiling your persecutors at every turn, and I am at the same time endeavouring to obtain information about the lady which will make your hand strong if ever you have to show it. You shall hold the trump card, sir.’

Mr. Delbec instructed his agent to spare no pains and no expense to settle the matter, and he was liberal in the matter of expenses. The firm of Spyers and Co. not only paid their rent and handed the housekeeping money over regularly to their wives, but they burst out into new clothes and smoked the best cigars, and occasionally, in the privacy of their chambers, cracked a quart of champagne and drank each other’s health.

They played the game as long as they thought it wise to play it, and, while playing, they took care to work as well. They worked so effectively that at the end of six months they had Mrs. Delbec’s romantic history complete, and neatly written out on thirty sheets of foolscap in the most methodical manner, and there were very few links missing in the chain of evidence. There was nothing very startling in her life’s story. It only went to show that she was what the world would call an adventuress, and that Mr.

Delbec was not the first prize she had played for, though he was the prize she had most effectively landed.

‘I don’t think it’s very strong,’ said Mr. Wilkins, as he read the dossier carefully. ‘If this is a bold woman this won’t frighten her.’

‘No,’ replied Mr. Spyers thoughtfully, ‘I don’t think it’s much by itself, but I don’t forget that when I told her her whole past life was being inquired into she *was* frightened.’

‘Then there’s something we haven’t found out.’

‘I think so.’

‘We’d better wait and find it, then.’

‘No!’

‘Why not?’

‘Because I think it will do as well if I pretend we have found it. At any rate, I’ll go to Brussels to-morrow and try the effect.’

And to Brussels he went. And the day after Mr. Wilkins received a telegram.

‘Returning to-night. Meet me Charing Cross, 5.40 to-morrow morning. Important.’

‘Hullo! What’s up now?’ exclaimed Mr. Wilkins.  
‘Nothing gone wrong, I hope?’

At 5.40 the Ostend mail steamed into Charing Cross, and Mr. Spyers jumped out of a second-class carriage, and eagerly scanned the platform for his partner. Mr. Wilkins arrived immediately afterwards, puffing and blowing. He had forgotten to engage a cab, and had to walk, which made him late.

‘Well!’ he exclaimed, ‘is all right?’

‘Yes; but we must settle at once.’

‘What’s the hurry? Found anything more out?’

‘No; but I shall have to if it goes on. She’ll settle now—cheap—one thousand pounds down, and she’ll sign a deed of separation and go to America. She’s coming on by the mail this morning. Tomorrow she’ll meet Delbec at his solicitors’, and sign. He can get the deed drawn to-day.’

‘She undertakes to bring no petition?’

‘Oh yes, that’s all right. Delbec will be satisfied. You’ve earned the three hundred—go and see him before he’s time to go out.’

‘Spyers, old chap, you know something. There is danger.’

‘I don’t know anything, but I guess something, and, dash it all! we must be honest to our clients if we can. I don’t want to lose her thou., you know.’

It was in vain Mr. Wilkins pressed his partner for a further explanation, so he was obliged to go off without it and interview the M.P.

Mr. Delbec was delighted at the news. At any rate, there was an end to the suspense in which the threat of proceedings had kept him, and he consented to the terms at once, and went off to his solicitors to arrange the preliminaries.

On the following day at twelve o'clock husband and wife met at the lawyer's office, and a deed was signed which lifted the burden from the M.P.'s heart. His wife undertook to take no further action against him, and he handed her a cheque for one thousand pounds, it being understood that she would relinquish his name and go to America.

Of course, it did not exactly clear him of his liability in the event of her making further demands upon him. She was his wife. But it was a solution of the difficulty, and Mr. Delbec believed that he would be troubled no further. He had had enough of matrimony, and wasn't likely to want to try the experiment again, and, at any rate, it gave him peace for a time and settled the divorce proceedings.

As soon as the deed was signed and he had bidden

the lady good-bye, and expressed a hope that she would enjoy herself and do well in the United States, the relieved M.P. returned to his chambers and found Mr. Wilkins waiting for him.

‘I trust you are satisfied with the result of my labours, sir,’ said that gentleman.

‘Perfectly,’ said Mr. Delbec ; ‘here is your money, and thank you.’

Mr. Delbec handed Mr. Wilkins a cheque for five hundred pounds, which at the detective’s request he did not cross, but left open, and the detective just got to the bank in time to exchange it for notes.

When a little later he met Mr. Spyers he handed him one hundred and fifty pounds, his half, and Mr. Spyers then handed him one hundred pounds, his half of the two hundred pounds he had received from Mrs. Delbec (it was three hundred pounds, but between partners little errors of arithmetic will occasionally happen), and then a bottle of champagne was sent for, and a bumper was drained to the health of ‘the parted pair.’

‘And now, Spyers, old man,’ said Mr. Wilkins, as he leaned back in his arm-chair, and gazed contentedly at the office ceiling, ‘tell me why you were in such a

hurry to get this business closed up at once. We might have had another hundred pounds "expenses."

'I'll tell you now, Wilkins, because you've done your duty by your client, and played fair and straight, as I hope we always shall do. The fact is, I'm very much afraid that the marriage wasn't a legal one.'

'Eh!' exclaimed Mr. Wilkins.

'I knew she was frightened about something, and she blurted it out. She let out she was a widow when she married Delbec, and on the certificate she was described, you know, as a spinster, and in her maiden name.'

'That didn't make the marriage illegal, did it?' said Wilkins.

'Perhaps not, but she was so thunderingly frightened about something that might come out that I've come to my own conclusion——'

'And that is——'

'That Mr. No. 1. isn't dead,' said Mr. Spyers.

Mr. Wilkins drew a long breath.

'Phew! That's what you'd got on your mind, was it? But, dash it all! if we'd found that out and told

Delbec, I should still have done my duty to my client and earned the three hundred pounds.'

'Yes, my boy,' replied Mr. Spyers; 'but I should have sold my client, for she wouldn't have got her thou., and, hang it all! you know, in a firm it's just as well that both the partners should be honest and serve their clients faithfully.'

\* \* \* \* \*

The firm of Spyers and Co. still flourishes. Business has come rapidly, and the capital acquired over the Delbec case has been used to a good purpose.

And the trade-mark of the firm is still 'Absolute Discretion.'



## A FIVE-POUND NOTE

It was past midnight, and Piccadilly Circus was thronged. At the corner a number of respectable people, who had been to places of amusement, were waiting patiently for the heavily-laden buses that drew up one after another.

As each bus drew up at the kerb the little crowd pressed forward, and there was the usual wild struggle for places, in which men and women alike forgot the first principles of politeness, and remembered only that it was late at night, and home was a long way off.

On the pavement, laughing, singing, and hustling each other, were a number of disreputable people, male and female—women old and young, who bore upon their faces the brand of their calling, and men old and young, who sauntered leisurely, cigar in mouth, up and down, surveying the poor painted

creatures of the Christian slave-market with a critical eye.

A tall, military-looking man of about forty, whose Inverness cape, worn wide open, revealed the large expanse of snowy shirt-front peculiar to evening dress, stood at the corner smoking a cigarette.

Standing well back against the shutters of Swan and Edgar's, he was in a position to scrutinize every woman who passed.

Several looked at him—one or two spoke to him—but he took no notice.

One pale-faced girl, neatly dressed in black, after passing him twice, came back and stood beside him. He moved a few paces away, and she followed him and wished him good-evening.

He looked at her almost contemptuously, and, turning on his heel, walked in the opposite direction. She followed him, and, coming up by his side, walked towards St. James's Hall with him.

'I want to get home,' she said, 'and I haven't a copper. Won't you give me my bus fare?'

The man laughed.

'Only a bus fare?' he said. 'I thought all you young ladies wanted cab fares?'

‘I’m not pretending, sir,’ the girl replied. ‘I’ve a sick child at home, and I haven’t a shilling in the world. If you’ll give me the money for my bus you can see me into it.’

The man shrugged his shoulders and put his hand in his pocket.

‘You don’t expect me to believe you, I suppose, but there’s your fare;’ and he handed her what he believed to be a sixpence.

The girl took the coin, thanked him, and turned away. A minute afterwards she was by his side again.

‘I beg your pardon, sir, but you’ve given me half a sovereign,’ she said, holding the coin up that he might see it.

Now, John Alister was a man about town in the worst sense of the word. He was an old habitué of the West End thoroughfares where the night side of ‘life’ is to be seen, and he had a long experience of the class of ladies who ask gentlemen for ‘cab fares.’

‘You’re a queer sort,’ he exclaimed, staring hard at the girl. ‘What’s the game? Do you think I shall take the half-sovereign back and give you a sovereign

for your honesty? Have you tried the dodge before and found it answer?’

‘No, sir,’ replied the girl indignantly. ‘I tell you the truth. I wanted enough to pay my bus fare. You meant to give me sixpence, and you made a mistake. Here’s your half-sovereign; I’ll walk home.’

Alister shook his head.

‘No, my dear,’ he said, ‘you’d better keep it. It will do you more good than it will me. I’m sorry if I’ve insulted you, and I beg your pardon. Shake hands.’

He put out his hand, and the girl took it, and he held it a moment to get a good look at her.

They were standing in the light of a street lamp.

John Alister saw that the girl was young and had been pretty, and the tears were in her eyes.

‘Come, come, little one,’ he said kindly; ‘I see I’ve made a mistake, but you needn’t take it to heart. When a girl asks a man for money in such a place as this——’

‘You are right,’ replied the girl, interrupting him. ‘I’ve never done it before, but—but you looked like a gentleman, and I was so tired and so faint I didn’t

feel strong enough to walk home, and I wanted to get back to my baby.'

'Well, you shan't go away and think I'm a black-guard. I don't mean to insult you again, and I believe every word you say. I'm sorry you're in great trouble, and I should like to help you. Will you take this for the little one?'

He took a five-pound note from his pocket and pressed it into the girl's hand.

The girl hesitated a moment, then she closed her hand upon the gift.

'I will take it,' she said, 'for, God knows, I want it! Ah, sir, you don't know what you have saved me from; but I can only take it on one condition!'

'Well?'

'That you give me an address to which I can return it.'

John Alister laughed.

'If it will make the gift more acceptable to you,' he said, 'you shall have it on your own terms. You can return it to John Alister, the Talbot Club, Piccadilly.'

The girl repeated the words slowly to impress them on her memory.

“John Alister, the Talbot Club, Piccadilly.”  
Thank you, Mr. Alister, and good-night.’

She shook hands with him, and in a moment was gone.

‘This is a queer go!’ exclaimed Alister, looking after her. ‘I wonder what her story is? Poor little woman, I suppose it’s the old one—a little work-girl who’s come to grief, and wants to keep straight if she can. . . . I suppose I shall never see my fiver again.’

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. John Alister was what is popularly known as a good fellow. He had inherited a considerable sum of money from his father at the age of five-and-twenty, and he had had his fling with it. At the age of thirty-five he was a little tired of the game, and he sat down to look the future in the face. He saw that if he went on at the rate he had been going he would be left in an uncomfortable position, so he dropped some of his expensive habits, reckoned up his available capital, found that by investing it he would be sure to secure £500 a year, and this he presently did. Then he looked about him for a means of employing his leisure and keeping himself out of mischief, and

he found a secretaryship which was worth another £500, and the duties of which were not too onerous.

On a thousand a year he could live comfortably in a set of modest chambers, and, having no desire to marry and incur domestic responsibilities, he was able to live a pleasant, enjoyable life.

He belonged to a good club, and his income was large enough to enable him to knock about town after business hours, and to enjoy himself after the fashion of his kind. Enjoying himself in this way, it was not likely that his adventure in Piccadilly would make any great impression upon him. In a few nights he had forgotten it altogether, and it was, therefore, with considerable astonishment that about a month afterwards, opening a letter one evening, which had been sent to the club for him, he found in it a brand-new five-pound note.

For a moment he thought it must be from some friend who owed him a fiver for a bet, which he had forgotten, or something of that kind; but when he had read the letter in which the note was enclosed, his curious adventure in Piccadilly came back to him at once.

This was the letter :

‘SIR,

‘I send you back the money you so kindly lent me one night in Piccadilly. I shall always be grateful to you for your kindness.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘LILIAN WILSON.’

‘Well, I’m hanged!’ exclaimed John Alister, as he looked at the note. ‘This is honesty with a vengeance. I never expected to see that again. Poor little girl! I hope she has not put herself to any trouble to pay this back. She was welcome to it.’

He turned to the letter again to see if there was any address on it. There was nothing but ‘London.’ It was evident that Lilian Wilson did not desire an acknowledgment.

John Alister put the five-pound note in his waist-coat-pocket and the letter in his breast-pocket, and strolled into the smoking-room, sat down, and picked up an evening paper and began to read.

Presently his eye was attracted by a sensational headline. A terrible outrage had been committed in a railway-train. An old gentleman had been murderously assaulted and left for dead in a first-class



compartment of the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway late on the previous evening.

The ticket-collector at Preston Park was the first to discover the outrage, and he at once raised an alarm. The old gentleman was alive, but unconscious, and bleeding from a terrible wound in the head.

Inquiries made along the line and at the station had elicited the fact that a dark, well-dressed young man had entered the carriage at London Bridge, and a man answering the description had alighted at Redhill. Between Redhill and Preston Park no one, it was presumed, had entered the carriage, or an alarm would have been raised. The police were busily engaged in searching for that dark young man.

The identity of the injured man had been proved by papers found in his possession, and his friends had been communicated with. He was found to be a Mr. Solomon Turner, a retired tradesman living in London, who was going to Brighton for a fortnight for the benefit of his health. His brother, Mr. James Turner, who identified him, at once put the crime down to robbery, as Mr. Turner had on the day of his departure cashed a cheque for £55 at the bank, and had placed the notes which he received in his pocket-book.

His brother knew this for fact, as he accompanied him to the station, and saw him pay for his ticket with one of the five-pound notes. The others were then in his possession.

Mr. James Turner did not see his brother into a carriage. He was early, and he left him on the platform, having an appointment elsewhere.

The change was still in the pocket of the injured man. His gold watch and chain were still about him, but the pocket-book and the ten five-pound notes were missing.

The police had at once communicated with the bank, and obtained the numbers of the notes. The numbers were published in the paper in order that, should any person attempt to pass one, the police might be instantly communicated with. They ran from BL 74,886 to BL 74,895 inclusive.

John Alister read the account of the outrage through, and put the paper down. He remembered the note he had just received from Lilian Wilson. Smiling to himself at the absurdity of the idea that it would have anything to do with the crime, he drew it from his pocket, and just out of mere idle curiosity looked at the number printed on it.

With an exclamation of horror he let the note fall on to his lap, and picked up the paper again to make sure that he was right.

The number of the note in his possession was BL 74,889.

It was one of the notes which had been stolen by the person who had left Mr. Solomon Turner for dead in a first-class carriage on the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway.

It took John Alister a minute or two to realize the situation. Then he burst into a profuse perspiration. He had in his pocket a note which was a clue to a murderous outrage—perhaps to a murder, for according to the report the old gentleman's life was despaired of.

What was he to do? His duty was plain. He must go at once with the note to Scotland Yard, and explain how it came into his possession. Fortunately, he had Lilian Wilson's note to prove the truth of his statement.

He took the letter and the envelope out of his pocket, and examined the latter closely. The letter had been posted that very day. He inquired of the hall-porter when it arrived, and was informed that it came by the last post.

‘It must have been posted this afternoon,’ he said to himself. ‘The girl must have received it from someone this morning—possibly from the murderer.’

John Alister began to feel very uncomfortable. In the first place, he didn’t want the story of his lending a fiver to a girl in Piccadilly to get into the papers, and he didn’t see how it was to be kept out, and, in the second place, he had an idea that his information to the police would drag this girl into the affair in a very unpleasant manner.

He didn’t believe for one moment that Lilian Wilson had any guilty knowledge of the real ownership of the note she had sent him. He argued with himself that had she for one moment believed it to be the proceeds of a crime, she would not have sent it to him. It would have been running the risk of incriminating herself.

‘I can’t help the consequences,’ he said to himself. ‘I must go to Scotland Yard at once and make a clean breast of everything.’

John Alister, as soon as he had thoroughly made up his mind what he ought to do, felt that he ought to do it at once.

He would have preferred to 'sleep on it,' to put the business off until the morning; but he felt that by so doing he might be aiding a criminal's escape from justice. His 'clue' might be invaluable to the police at the present moment.

He pulled himself together, and ordered the waiter to bring him a liqueur-glass of brandy. He wanted to steady his nerves a little before undergoing the ordeal of Scotland Yard.

While he was waiting for the brandy a waiter came in with a message from the hall-porter to him. A young lady had left a note for Mr. Alister, and wished to know if he was in the club.

Alister took the note and opened it. It was from Lilian Wilson :

'SIR,

'Will you see me at once? I am outside the club. It is a matter of life and death.'

'My God! Then she knows about the murder,' he thought; and, putting on his hat, he went out into the street.

The girl to whom he had lent the five-pound note was standing in the shadow, a little way from the

club entrance. She saw him come out, and walked towards him at once.

Directly she came into the light of the lamp he saw that her face was deathly pale, and her eyes red with weeping.

‘Mr. Alister,’ exclaimed the girl, before he had time to say a word, ‘you won’t mind my sending for you like this, but I want to see you about something—about something very terrible.’

‘I can guess what it is,’ replied Alister. ‘I have compared the number of the note you sent me to-day, with the numbers mentioned in the account of the outrage on the railway.’

‘Have you?’ cried the girl. ‘Then you know——’

‘That it is one of the missing notes. But come, I am sure you are not directly concerned in this terrible business. Tell me—how do you come to know that it is one of them? Young ladies are not in the habit of taking the number of a note before they send it away, I fancy.’

‘I know it is one of them,’ said the girl, ‘because I have the others. See!’ she exclaimed, drawing an envelope from her pocket and taking a number of folded bank-notes out; ‘here are all the missing notes

with the exception of the one I sent you this afternoon.'

John Alister was completely taken aback. How did this girl, who not so long ago had asked him for her fare in Piccadilly, come to be possessed of fifty pounds—and of fifty pounds in bank-notes which had been stolen from the victim of an attempted murder?

Alister hesitated before he replied. His first idea was that he ought at once to call a policeman, but he felt that the girl was acting fairly by him, and concealing nothing. She had come to him of her own free-will, and she had made no concealment of the possession of the stolen property.

'My dear girl,' he said presently, 'this is a very serious affair. You must go to the authorities and tell them all you know. Of course, you have come by these notes innocently enough, but they are a most important clue to the discovery of the man who committed the crime. I don't want to ask you any impertinent questions, but you'll have to say from whom you obtained these notes.'

'That's the worst of it,' answered the girl, her eyes filling with tears. 'I don't want to do that. I can't; and I came to see you to-night hoping I should be

able to stop your going to the police and saying how you got the note in your possession.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed John Alister. 'You mustn't talk to me like that. You cannot expect that I shall help you to keep a matter like this secret. Why, it's assisting a murderer!'

'But if you know all—if I tell you all——'

'My good girl, I am quite willing to believe that you are innocent of any evil intention in the matter; but, after all, you are a perfect stranger to me. I know nothing about you except that I met you in Piccadilly Circus, and gave you five pounds.'

'No! you lent me five pounds, and I have honestly returned it to you.'

'That is true; but the note you send me is part of the proceeds of a robbery—a robbery with murderous violence.'

'Well,' said the girl, brushing her tears away and hardening her face, 'at any rate, I am here, and I have shown you the notes. I have concealed nothing. You have me in your power. At any moment you can seize my arm and call a policeman. Will you hear what I have to say before you decide what you will do?'



‘Yes; I don’t think I can be doing any harm. But I don’t think anything you can say will induce me to alter my mind.’

‘Hear what I have to say first; then, when I have told you, you can decide. It is not very much I am going to ask you. See, here are the notes I have—take them.’

She handed the envelope with the notes in it to Alister.

He took the packet and put it in his pocket.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘you have all the notes. To-morrow you can take them to Scotland Yard. I want you to take them to-morrow, but not to-night.’

‘Why not to-night?’

‘Because I don’t want to be hunted down to-night. I don’t want to be traced by the police.’

‘What have you to fear?’

‘Nothing for myself—everything for my husband.’

‘Your husband!’

‘Yes; the man who gave me those notes was my husband.’

‘Is he a dark young man?’

‘No; he is not the man who travelled with Mr. Turner—don’t have any fear. I am not asking you

to shield a thief and an assassin. I am asking you to shield a man who has suffered much already, but who will suffer more if you refuse my request to-night.'

'Well, tell me your story. I shall know better how to answer you when I have heard it.'

'The night I saw you I was in terrible distress. You thought I was much as the other women who were in Piccadilly, laughing and joking and carrying on. You were mistaken. I was only a wife and a mother in terrible trouble. I had been waiting about all day, hoping to meet my husband, who had been trying to get a little money for me and the child—the child who was ill. He didn't keep his appointment, and I hadn't a penny, and I wanted to get back to my baby. I heard women ask men for cab-fares; I saw money given. I thought I would ask someone for a bus fare, for I was worn out, and dreaded the long weary walk home. You looked like a gentleman, and I, with the recklessness of despair, asked you. You know the rest.'

'I don't understand you,' broke in Alister. 'If you have a husband, why did you want to wait about Piccadilly to meet him? Why shouldn't you have waited at home for him?'

‘Why? I will tell you why; and in telling you I’m trusting you with the secret of my life. My husband had made himself liable to the law. He had in a fit of desperation—madness, call it what you like—used money belonging to his employers. He thought his father would give him the money to enable him to pay it back before his crime was discovered. His father refused: sent him away from his door with hard, cruel words; and then he was afraid to go back to his situation—afraid to return to me and his child. He was afraid that he would be arrested. After he had gone I did a little work, and kept the home together as well as I could; but work fell off, and the night that you met me I hadn’t a penny in the world. I used to meet him once a week near the circus. It was my night. He had written to me that he would make one more appeal to his father, tell him of his marriage to me, of his child, and try and touch his heart that way. But I waited for him, and he never came, and I knew that his last effort had failed.’

‘But your husband—Mr. Wilson?’

‘His name is not Wilson; Wilson is only the name I used to sign my letter to you. My name is Lilian

Turner ; my husband is the son of the man who was robbed and left for dead in the railway-carriage.'

' Good God !'

A horrible idea flashed through John Alister's mind. He believed now that this poor girl's husband had attacked and robbed his own father, and that the wife was trying to stop him from giving his information, lest it should bring her husband to the gallows.

Lilian Turner guessed what was passing in her companion's mind.

' I know what you are thinking,' she exclaimed ; ' but you are wrong. Do you think, if it was so bad as that, I should be talking here with you now ? No ; my husband has made one terrible mistake in his life—for that, if he were arrested now, he would have to answer ; but he has no share in this terrible crime !'

' But, my dear young lady, it looks very black against him. Mr. James Turner saw these notes in your father-in-law's possession at the station. He took one of them to pay for his ticket. He then went on the platform and into the train, and in that train he is found nearly murdered with the notes missing. These notes were in your husband's possession to-day,

for you say he gave them to you. Unless he stole them from his father, how did he get them ?’

‘ I’ll tell you how he got them. My husband saw his father the night before he left for London and made one last appeal to him. At that interview he told him all—told him of his marriage, of his child, of the foolish, wicked thing he had done, and of all he had suffered. He must have touched his heart to a certain extent, for he promised to think it over, and told him to meet him on the platform at London Bridge the next evening. My husband went and met his father there, and his father gave him fifty pounds in notes, bidding him go at once to his employers and place himself at their mercy, offering at the same time the money, about thirty pounds, of which he had made use. That money my husband brought to me that night. It was in my possession that night. To-day my husband was to have taken the thirty pounds to his employers ; but at the last moment his courage failed him, and he asked me to go. I went, and they were out. I came back and sent you five out of the twenty pounds he had to spare. After I had posted it my husband came in with a white, terrified face, and a paper in his hand. “ My God ! ”

he said, "my poor father has been murdered, and the murder is supposed to have been committed for these notes. See, here are the numbers of them in the paper. No one knew that I went to meet him on the platform; no one saw him give them to me. My God—my God! what will people think?" I left him at home, and I came here to see you at once, if possible, and tell you everything. Now you know. Give us till to-morrow. To-morrow my husband will have had time to recover his courage. To-morrow he shall go to the police and tell everything. If you go with this note to-night and put them on his track, they will find him, and he will be arrested. That will be against him—terribly against him.'

'Have you told me everything?' asked John Alister, looking into the girl's face.

'Everything!'

'Why did your husband quarrel with his father?'

'His father was a very stern man, and my husband was hot-tempered. They quarrelled, and his father told him to go and earn his own living and trouble him no more, and he went. It was after he left his father's house that I met him and married him. I was in employment then. I was in a milliner's shop.

I earned my living as a milliner while I could after my husband left me.'

John Alister knew instinctively that the girl's story was true. He guessed she was just a hard-working little woman, with whom the world had gone wrong, and he felt sorry for her; but he didn't quite see keeping the secret of those terrible five-pound notes. He felt that he would be acting wrongly in doing so.

'I tell you what I will do, Mrs. Turner,' he said, after a pause. 'I'll come back with you, if you'll allow me, and see your husband. I'm a man of the world, and may be able to advise him.'

'Very well; come. It's a long way. We live at Kentish Town.'

'We can take a cab.'

Alister hailed a cab, and the strange couple got into it, and were driven to Kentish Town. Mrs. Turner lived in a side-street running out of the main road.

She opened the door with a latchkey, and they went upstairs together.

John Alister thought it was the strangest adventure he had ever had in his life.

As they entered the little sitting-room a young man

of six- or seven-and-twenty started up, horrified. He had heard the sound of a man's footsteps on the stairs.

'Don't be alarmed, dear,' said his wife. 'This is a friend. He is the gentleman who has the five-pound note.'

Turner sank back into the chair and buried his face in his hands.

'My wife has told you all?' he said.

'Yes.'

'And you won't go to the police to-night?'

'Yes, I must; but I want you to come with me. It is the best thing you can do, believe me.'

For over half an hour John Alister sat in the little room and urged the terrified man to do the only sensible thing possible, and at last he consented; and after a painful farewell scene with his wife (for he made up his mind he would be arrested and locked up), young Turner went downstairs with John Alister, and they drove to Scotland Yard together, and were shown into the presence of the officer in charge.

John Alister commenced by handing over to the astonished functionary a bundle of bank-notes.



‘Those notes,’ he said, ‘you will find are the notes supposed to have been stolen from Mr. Turner in the Brighton train.’

The inspector looked up sharply.

‘How did they come into your possession?’ he inquired.

‘This gentleman is Mr. Turner’s son. He will tell you all about them.’

‘Oh, you are Mr. Turner’s son,’ said the officer, turning to the terrified man. ‘Then I have good news for you. Your father has recovered consciousness, and has been able to speak.’

‘He has spoken? He has explained that he gave these notes to me?’

‘No. He has said very little, for he has not been able to talk; but we know about these notes.’

‘You know——’

‘Yes. You need not be alarmed about your possession of them. Messrs. Johnson and Co.—who, I believe, were at one time your employers—have called upon us to-day, and produced a letter from your father.’

‘A letter from my father!’

‘A letter written the night before he left for

Brighton. He informed them that he intended on the morrow to give you a sum of money, and that you would call upon them and make them a payment, and he trusted, for the sake of their old friendship, that they would *receive* you kindly.'

'Thank God!' cried the son. 'Then there will be no suspicion attaching to me now.'

'No. We might have suspected you, as the possession of the notes would have had to be accounted for, and your story might have been uncorroborated; but there is no fear of that now. To-night we have arrested a man who is the undoubted culprit. He is a well-known bad character. He must have seen those notes in your father's possession at the ticket-office; and doubtless, seeing your father afterwards in an empty carriage, he got in with the intention of robbing him. He did not see your father part with the notes to you, evidently. He spent his time searching for the notes, and probably the train pulling up at Redhill stopped him robbing your father of the few articles of value he had about him, and he left the train at once and made his escape. We traced him by the description, and arrested him to-night. There is blood on his clothes, and he has been identi-

fied by the porter at Redhill. Leave us your address, and we will communicate further particulars to-morrow.'

Outside in the open air young Turner reeled and grasped John Alister's arm. The sudden revulsion of feeling had been almost too much for him.

He was free from the load which had been upon him for months—free from this new terror which had come upon him like an avalanche. His employers had not betrayed him to the police.

He insisted upon Alister accompanying him to his home and helping him to tell the good news to his wife—the good news that he need have no further fear, and that his father was out of danger.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Solomon Turner recovered his health and strength in time, and appeared to give evidence against the would-be assassin, who was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. He freely forgave his son all past peccadilloes, and took his daughter-in-law to his heart and home.

They are a happy, united family now, and one of their most constant visitors is Mr. John Alister.

But there is a tacit understanding between Mr.

Alistair and Mr. and Mrs. Turner junior that no mention shall ever be made of the five-pound note lent at Piccadilly Circus, which was the prologue to what looked at one time like being a very terrible tragedy.

## A YOUNG FOOL

‘WHAT a magnificent creature!’ exclaimed young Sir George Murgatroyd, as he sat in the stalls of the Apollo Music Hall and listened to Miss Daisy Delamere, who, amid rapturous applause, was singing her well-known ditty of ‘Then you jerk the other elbow.’

‘She’s a stunner, isn’t she?’ said his companion, Bob Ballantine. ‘I know her well; would you like to be introduced?’

‘By Jove! that I should, old fellow. She’s a clinker, and no mistake. Wouldn’t she look well on my dog-cart? Give some of the other chaps fits.’

‘I don’t know about the dog-cart, Murgy; don’t run your precious noddle against a brick wall. Miss Delamere’s a star, you know, a tip-top artiste, and a young lady who knows how to take care of herself. She doesn’t hop up on to the first dog-cart that comes

along. If I introduce you, you'll have to behave yourself. Understand !'

'Oh, all right, Bob ! It's only my way of talking. You've never known me make an ass of myself yet, have you ?'

'It depends on what you call making an ass of yourself. I know I got into fearful hot water at the Camelia Club for taking you there the other night.'

'Oh, well, I was a bit on, that night !'

'A bit *on* ; I should think you were a bit *off*. I give you my word that when I saw you brandishing a bottle of fizz and threatening to spread poor old Colonel Blab's brains on the carpets, I felt as if I could have taken you by the collar and given you a thundering good hiding.'

'Well, what did he insult me for by calling me a silly young fool ?'

'He was quite right, old chappie ; you were a silly young fool. The way you were carrying on with Madame Toulon, who's old enough to be your mother, was ridiculous.'

'I was only chaffing her. You don't suppose I was really flirting with an old girl like that !'

'My dear boy, if you weren't such a fearfully callow

bird, you'd have known that Mrs. Toulon is really Mrs. Colonel Blab.'

'Go on! You don't mean to say that she's the Colonel's wife?'

'Well, it's a bit of a morganatic mix. She hasn't got exactly the sort of certificate that the Lord Chamberlain would say "Right you are" to if it was presented at Buckingham Palace on Drawing-room day; but they have their breakfast bacon off the same rasher, and their morning milk is left down the same area.'

'Ah, I begin to see now!'

'It oughtn't to have strained your eyesight much to see it before.'

'But, I say, Blab isn't the Colonel's real name, is it?'

'You are a treat, Murgy,' exclaimed Bob, leaning back in his stall, and roaring so loudly that, the stage being occupied by a sentimental lady who was warbling a consumptive love-song three bars behind the orchestra, the chairman rapped his hammer smartly on the table, and indignantly said: 'Order, order, if you please!'

'Blab his real name?' said Bob, wiping the tears

from his eyes. 'Oh, Murgy, you'll be the death of me some day, I know you will!'

'I don't see anything to laugh at; everybody spoke of him as old Blab.'

'Of course they did. He got that name years ago, and it'll stick to him till he gets his right name back again on a tombstone. He's called Blab, my boy, because when he was a lump younger than he is now, and started as a masher in his middle age, he never made a conquest but he went and bragged around about it.'

'P'raps he's not a Colonel, either?'

'Oh yes, he is, or he was. He was a Colonel for about ten minutes in Mexico or somewhere, where his father had a gambling saloon. He came over here and tried to run a show or two in the same line, but the police regulations here weren't framed to suit his business, and he retired and took to running clubs like the Camelia.'

'Is the Camelia his, then?'

'Yes, my boy. The Colonel is the real proprietor, and that's why I'm sorry you made an enemy of him. He and Madame Toulon are the presiding deities of the delightful haunt where you made an ass of your-



self, and they are two of the most useful people in London for a young fellow like you to know.'

Young Sir George Murgatroyd's face fell. He had, just at the age of two-and-twenty, come into his father's title and his father's fortune, and he was eagerly anxious to have his fling and earn a reputation as a young man about town. And he had placed himself in a false position at the very beginning. He had made enemies of two people who, according to Bob Ballantine—who knew everything and everybody—would best have furthered his aspirations.

Old George Murgatroyd—Honest George, as he was called up North—had started life as a miner, and ended life as one of the wealthiest men and largest property owners in Yorkshire. He had been made a baronet on the occasion of the opening, by Royalty, of the magnificent museum which he had presented to his native town; but he had buried his wife before the crowning honour came upon him, and he had centred all his affections in his only son. The boy had been supplied with the pocket-money of a prince before he was out of his teens; he had been sent to Eton and then to Oxford. Here he had done nothing but get into debt and make a fool of himself. Of his debts

and his follies the old miner knew nothing. He died while young George was still at the University, and left the young reprobate a gigantic fortune and his title.

Young Sir George lost no time in taking a magnificent flat in London and getting round him all the outward and visible signs of luxury. He had no difficulty in getting into 'the right set,' from his point of view, and his principal guide, philosopher and friend was Mr. Bob Ballantine, of whom very little was known except that he was the first to get hold of what, in the expressive vulgar language of the day, is known as 'a rich young Juggins.'

Mr. Ballantine was a tall, elegant, good-looking man of about two- or three-and-thirty. He was a member of all the best Bohemian clubs, he was the best-dressed man in London, a first-class judge of wines, horses and cigars. In the art of ordering a dinner he had no equal; he was on intimate terms with the cleverest men on the turf, and in certain theatrical and music-hall circles he was always received with open arms.

He always had plenty of ready money, and he never wanted for anything. He drove a mail phaeton

and he had a Swiss valet, and yet he confessed that he was a poor man.

Once, in a moment of frankness, he confessed that he had no income of his own, and, pressed as to how, with no income, he managed to do so well, he candidly acknowledged that, having no income, he assisted men who had incomes to spend theirs.

That was the sort of man Mr. Bob Ballantine was, and it was in the exercise of his profession as a friend of Fortunatus that he swooped down upon young Sir George Murgatroyd, and undertook to induct him into the mysteries of London life.

The conversation which I have inflicted on the reader at the opening of this veracious narrative was necessary to explain the relative position of the two men. It began in a discussion concerning the perfections and graces of Miss Daisy Delamere, the serio-comic Queen of Song, and it ended in a promise on Mr. Ballantine's part to introduce his young friend that evening to the object of his admiration.

The only thing that damped Sir George's enthusiasm was that the introduction would have to take place at the Camelia, where the foolish youth had

recently made an exhibition of himself and mortally offended Colonel Blab and Madame Toulon.

He thought the matter over, and as they left the hall together he asked his friend if he could not manage to introduce him to Miss Delamere in some other way—that is to say, at some other place.

‘I can’t very well go there again, Bob, yet; and if I did, somebody would be sure to tell Miss Delamere about the scene the other night, and I don’t want her to think I’m a young fool.’

Bob Ballantine laughed.

‘I’m not sure she won’t wherever I introduce you, Murgy,’ he said. ‘But there, I see you are a bit gone in that quarter. Love at first sight, and all that sort of thing, eh? Then I’ll tell you what I’ll do: You give a little dinner at the Café Royal next Sunday, and I’ll invite Miss Delamere.’

‘Only we three?’

‘Good gracious, no! She wouldn’t come. It must be a party. I shall ask her to meet you. I’ll get Charlie Linthorpe to bring Polly Grey. I’ll bring Kitty Stevens, and then the Delamere and yourself will make six. How will that do?’

‘Splendidly!’

‘Very well, then, it’s agreed. I’ll arrange everything—leave it to me.’

On the following Sunday, at the Café Royal, the little party duly assembled. Miss Delamere came with Miss Stevens (they were bosom friends), and was with much ceremony introduced to the young Baronet, ‘our noble host,’ as Bob Ballantine playfully called him.

It was a very jolly dinner-party. It began at eight, and it lasted till a few minutes to eleven, when the manager respectfully informed the company that, by legislature’s harsh decree, the establishment would have to close.

Sir George Murgatroyd’s admiration for Miss Delamere knew no bounds. She was really very pretty, and undoubtedly a clever woman. She was an artiste to the tip of her finger-nails, and owed her success quite as much to her talents as to her appearance.

That night as Sir George walked with his friend Ballantine to the Pelican, after seeing the ladies into their broughams, he could talk of nothing else. He was anxious to know all about her. Was she engaged to any fellow, was she spoons on anybody,

where did she live, and what did Bob know about her ?

All that Bob knew, or professed to know, was that Miss Delamere had a reputation for being 'square,' and that she was popularly supposed to live with an aged mother, of whom she was the sole support. Bob had never heard of her having any attachment or encumbrance of any kind, and he declared it to be his own private opinion that there wasn't a cleverer, more stylish or more agreeable young lady in the profession than Daisy.

From that night Sir George was a constant attendant at the halls where Daisy Delamere sang, and many were the entertainments he gave in her honour, always with the assistance of his friend Bob, who was such a splendid organizer.

During all this time the young Baronet was extremely careful and circumspect. He was determined that Miss Delamere shouldn't think he was 'a young fool.' The lad was really head over ears in love, and, though the lady was at least five years his senior, he began to entertain serious thoughts of laying his title and fortune at her feet.

He was not only seriously smitten by the personal

charms of the lady, but he was dazzled by the limelight, which always followed Miss Delamere about the stage with the faithfulness of a pet dog.

When she came on for her great song and dance as 'Prince Pretty Poppet,' and struck an attitude at the end of each verse, the limelight made her eyes shine like pearls, and Sir George thought he had never seen anything so magnificent in his life. And when the applause broke out all over the high building in thunderclaps, and the stalls yelled *encore*, and the gallery boys whistled, and the air was rent with cries of delight, he felt that he would sacrifice the whole world to clasp that radiant creature in his arms and call her his.

But he was haunted by the fear of making a fool of himself. If she was to laugh at him or sneer at him he would never be able to hold up his head again.

So he became more assiduous than ever in his attentions, more lavish than ever in his entertainments, but he hesitated to speak the words that were on his lips and risk refusal.

One day when a little friendly party had taken place up the river, the conversation turned on racing, and Bob suggested that as next week was Sandown

they should have a drag and drive the ladies down.

The ladies were all in raptures.

‘Are you a good coachman, Sir George?’ said Miss Delamere.

Sir George blushed.

‘I’ve never tried four,’ he said, ‘but I can drive a pair. Would you be afraid to trust yourself to me?’

‘Oh no,’ replied Daisy, laughing; ‘I’m sure you’d take care of me.’

‘Then,’ exclaimed Sir George eagerly, ‘will you let me drive you down?’

‘With pleasure,’ said Daisy.

And so it was agreed that the others should have a coach, but Sir George should drive Daisy down in his phaeton.

It was quite a tremendous triumph for the lad.

He felt that it would be quite a grand thing to be seen at Sandown with Daisy Delamere beside him. All the fellows would know her, and they would all think what a lucky dog he was.

The great day came, and as Sir George drove proudly on the course with Daisy, looking absolutely enchanting in the daintiest racing costume imaginable,



he wouldn't have changed places with the Prince of Wales, who was sitting smoking a cigar in his private stand, with the Royal Standard of England floating proudly above him.

Alas, how soon a little cloud may gather and hide the sun! Hardly had they exchanged greetings with their friends on the four-in-hand, before a shabby-looking landau was driven into the carriage enclosure and drawn up by the side of them.

And the occupants were Colonel Blab and Madame Toulon.

The young Baronet's face flushed crimson. Since the night on which he had behaved so foolishly he had never entered the portals of the *Camelia*; and knowing that Daisy met them occasionally, he had always been on tenter-hooks lest the story of his folly should reach her ears.

But she had never mentioned the place to him, and he had carefully avoided ever referring to the Colonel.

And now the Colonel was at his side. In a moment he had recognised Daisy, and, getting out of the landau, came up and shook hands with her.

'Halloh, my dear, how are you?' he said, with an

air of familiarity that made Sir George want to try the champagne-bottle experiment again.

‘I’m all right,’ said Daisy, smiling; ‘but what are you and madame doing here? I didn’t know you went racing.’

‘Haven’t been to a meeting for ages; but we wanted an outing, and it was a fine day, so I thought we’d come here.’

Sir George was standing gloomily on the other side of the phaeton.

Daisy suddenly remembered him.

‘Oh, Colonel!’ she said, ‘you must let me introduce you to my friend, Sir George Murgatroyd. Sir George, this is——’

‘Colonel Blab,’ said Sir George, almost fiercely. ‘I’ve had the honour of meeting this gentleman before.’

Then he turned his back on the company and walked towards the drag.

The Colonel’s face couldn’t flash crimson—crimson was its usual colour—but it went a deep mulberry colour.

‘Colonel what did the young jackanapes call me?’ he yelled; then he walked round behind the phaeton,

and, going up to the drag, touched Sir George none too lightly on the shoulder with his umbrella. The Baronet turned round angrily.

‘What do you mean by touching me like that?’ exclaimed Sir George.

‘And what do you mean by calling me “Blab”?’

‘Eh?’ stammered Sir George; ‘isn’t it what everybody calls you? They did at the Camelia.’

‘Not to my face, sir. By ——, they know better than that! It’s a —— insult, sir. My name is Parks, and the next time we meet, don’t you forget it.’

‘Halloh, halloh! what’s the matter now?’ said Bob Ballantine, coming up in the middle of the altercation.

‘The young fool wants a lesson in manners, that’s all; and if he isn’t careful I’ll give it him.’

Sir George at that moment happened to glance in the direction of Daisy Delamere.

She was listening. She could hear every word. He had been called a young fool in her presence. It maddened him. Going right up to the Colonel, so close to him that their noses almost met, he said in a low voice:

‘I don’t want to make a scene before ladies, so I

won't answer you this time. Be good enough to go away, and leave me and my friends to enjoy ourselves.'

'Your friends!' yelled the Colonel—'your friends, you —— little stuck-up son of a coal-heaver! Bah!'

And without waiting for Sir George to recover from his indignation, he proceeded to climb on to the top of the drag and shake hands effusively with the occupants.

What was the unhappy boy to do? He couldn't climb up **after him** and punch his head. The Colonel had seated himself between Kitty Stevens and Polly Grey. Besides, the Colonel was an old man.

Almost choking with rage, he turned round to go back to Miss Delamere and offer her some explanation of the scene, and to his horror he beheld Madame Toulon beside her.

Madame had left her landau and coolly climbed into the phaeton, and had seated herself beside Daisy.

The boy could almost have danced with rage; as it was, tears of shame and mortification came into his eyes, and, to add to his confusion, Daisy beckoned him to come to her.

He couldn't refrain, so, biting his lip, he stepped up to the phaeton and raised his hat to the Toulon.

‘Ah, vot a naughty boy you vos!’ she said (she was a German). ‘Vot for you vant always to quarrel mit my ole man?’

Daisy laughed.

‘Whatever have you and the Colonel been saying to each other?’ she asked, in her pretty, quiet way. ‘I declare I was quite frightened; I thought you were going to fight.’

‘Oh, it’s nothing; I called him Colonel Blab. Upon my word, I thought it was the name he went by.’

‘Yes; it vas a nice name, vasn’t it?’ said Madame. ‘No vonder he vas vild. Dat’s de lie dem fellows talk about him ven they vant to put him in a passion at de club. He don’t like it; more wouldn’t you.’

‘It was rude,’ said Daisy; ‘but I am sure Sir George didn’t mean any harm. I expect that horrid Ballantine told you the Colonel’s name was Blab.’

‘Yes; it was Bob who told me.’

‘That’s a favourite joke of his; but, of course, he never expected you’d go and say it to the Colonel’s face.’

‘Vell, my ole man von’t forget it in a hurry. It’s de ting vot always make him mad.’

‘I’m sure I’m very sorry, Madame; but he was most insulting to me afterwards.’

‘Insulting! Mein Gott, I don’t vonder at it! But I shall ask him to forgive you; only he’ll be jealous perhaps if I do. He von’t forget vot you did at de club in a hurry.’

‘The club!’ exclaimed Daisy, with a look of surprise. ‘You don’t mean to say you go to the Camelia, Sir George?’

‘He don’t come again in a hurry!’ exclaimed Madame, with a grin. ‘Vot you tink he did? Made love to me under my ole man’s very nose, and then wanted to kill him mit a champagne-bottle.’

‘Made love to Madame! Oh, Sir George, how shocking!’ said Daisy, laughing.

‘Miss Delamere, I assure you it was a mistake. I’m afraid I’d had too much to drink, and I made a fool of myself; but I—er—I give you my word——’

‘Don’t abologize,’ said Madame. ‘Vot you mean is you wouldn’t have made love to an old woman like me if dat you vas not drunk.’

She said this with a grin that nearly drove the young Baronet mad.

‘I am sorry for what occurred that evening,’ he

stammered ; ‘ and, if you please, we won’t talk about it any more.’

‘ All right. You go and get a bottle of champagne from de coach there, and ve’ll have a glass togedher just to show dhere’s no ill-feeling.’

Sir George wished the Toulon would go. She was evidently going to spend the afternoon on his phaeton with Miss Delamere. But he couldn’t tell her to go down, and he couldn’t refuse her request, so, swallowing a strong word, he went to the coach for the champagne and the glasses, and brought it back to the ladies.

The boy was beside himself with mortification. That horrid Madame Toulon was on his phaeton by Daisy, and the Colonel glared at him from the top of the drag whenever he went near it to speak to his friends.

He had hoped for such a jolly day. He had intended to get all the tips from Ballantine, and tell Daisy, and put a ten-pound note on every one of them for her, and now he was too broken-hearted even to pay any attention to the races.

He hung over the rails and stared at the horses, and didn’t take the trouble to see which won.

Just before the last race the Colonel got off the drag and, passing him with a glare, went to the phaeton and talked to Madame and Daisy.

And Daisy actually laughed at what he said, and hit him playfully on the shoulder with her dainty parasol; and presently she called to Sir George, and when he went up, stupidly enough, for he felt he was in a false position, she said :

‘Now, then, you two must shake hands. You’re both good fellows, and I’m not going to have you hating each other.’

The Colonel put out his hand, and Sir George was compelled to put out his, and so for the time there was peace between them.

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After the last race the horses were put-to, and Sir George drove off the course as quickly as he could.

Daisy rallied him on his downcast look.

‘You are not thinking over that silly affair with the Colonel, are you?’

‘Yes, I am. I’m sorry that I lost my temper, because it was rude to you.’

‘Oh, nonsense! It was all Bob Ballantine’s fault, telling you people called him Blab. I explained it



all to the Colonel, and he won't think any more about it.'

'But, you know, Miss Delamere,' replied Sir Georg hesitatingly, 'he—he insulted me grossly.'

'Oh, what does it matter what he says?'

'Isn't he a—a friend of yours?'

'A friend of mine? Good gracious, no! I know him and I know Madame, but I should be sorry to call them my friends. In business we have to talk to and be agreeable to a lot of people we don't care about.'

'Then, you don't care about them at all?'

'Certainly not. And it's because I know just what they're worth that I was sorry to see you putting yourself in the wrong with them.'

'I'm so glad you don't like them, Miss Delamere. *I hate them!*'

Daisy laughed.

'They're not worth hating. He's a horrid old man and she's not much better; but they're useful people in their way, and nobody would think of quarrelling with them seriously.'

'I'm glad you say that, Miss Delamere. It's a great weight off my mind.'

Sir George was so much relieved in his feeling that Daisy despised the Colonel that he lit a cigar, and felt quite happy again.

But after he had parted with Miss Delamere, and was at home in his rooms by himself, he began to think over what had occurred, and the feeling of irritation returned.

He remembered that the Colonel had called him a 'son of a coal-heaver' and 'a young fool,' not only in Daisy's hearing, but in the hearing of all the people on the coach, and he wasn't at all satisfied with himself for shaking hands even at the bidding of Miss Delamere.

And he was awfully savage with Bob Ballantine, who, after all, was the real cause of the unpleasantness.

What business had he to tell him that the Colonel was always called Blab? While he was thinking the matter over, Bob came in, and Sir George began to unburden his mind at once.

Ballantine was not in a good temper. He had had a bad day, and—a very unusual thing for him—lost heavily.

'Oh, be hanged!' he said; 'if you make a young fool of yourself, don't bully me for it.'

‘Look here,’ cried Sir George furiously; ‘I’m not going to be called a young fool by you, so drop it!’

‘You are a young fool. If you hadn’t been you’d never have had a row on a racecourse with a fellow like Blab. You did give yourself away.’

‘Oh, did I? Well, you don’t grumble at what I give away generally.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You haven’t done so badly out of me, you know I wasn’t a young fool when I lent you a few hundred the other day. I’m not a young fool when I give dinners and let you ask all your friends to them I’m not a young fool when I let you go to my trades people——’

‘What!’ shouted Mr. Ballantine ‘You dare to talk to me like that! Why, you’re a —— young coal-heaver!’

That finished it. With a cry of rage Sir George sprang at his friend and seized him by the throat.

‘Apologize!’ he shouted. ‘Apologize, or I’ll throw you down the stairs!’

For a moment Bob Ballantine was disconcerted by the unexpected attack; but, recovering himself, he flung his arms round his youthful antagonist, and

lifting him up bodily, flung him full length on his back on the floor.

‘All right, you little beast!’ he said, as he walked to the door, ‘you shall pay for this. I’ll spoil your game with the Delamere.’

And before Sir George was fairly on his feet again Mr. Ballantine was gone.

In his rage at the last threat Murgatroyd forgot all the previous insults.

‘Spoil his game with the Delamere’—how dare the fellow talk like that of the woman he loved?

He would show them that he wasn’t going to be treated like a young fool in an affair of that sort.

As soon as he had recovered from his tumble, and his nerves had been steadied with a couple of liqueur-glasses of brandy, Sir George had his dinner and then went off to the Apollo.

He waited till Miss Delamere had finished her turn, and then went round to the stage-door.

She had two more turns that night, and her brougham was waiting for her.

‘Miss Delamere,’ he said, ‘I want to speak to you on a very important matter. May I call at your home to-morrow afternoon?’

Miss Delamere hesitated and looked into the boy's face.

‘If you wish it,’ she said. ‘Yes; perhaps it would be as well.’

She gave him the address, stepped into her brougham, and was driven off.

‘Perhaps it would be as well’—could she mean by that——

The next afternoon Sir George wended his way to the address given, and found it a modest little two-storied villa in Park Village East.

He knocked at the door and a maid-servant, who admitted him, and had evidently been advised of his visit, at once showed him into the drawing-room.

Daisy was there, and rose to greet him.

Sir George stammered and blushed, and then made a desperate plunge into the business that had brought him there.

‘Miss Delamere,’ he said, ‘we have known each other some time. I—er—hope you’ll forgive me if I am not doing the proper thing—not going about it as I ought to—that is—but I—I like you very much—I—er—I love you—upon my word I do, and I want to ask you to be—to be my wife.’

Daisy, with the sweetest look of confusion on her pretty face, stammered out that it was very kind of Sir George; but was he sure that he would be happy with her—would his friends care for the connection? He must remember that he was a Baronet, and she was only a music-hall artiste.

Sir George declared that he adored her—that he would never be happy without her, and she was in every way worthy to be Lady Murgatroyd.

The lady allowed herself to be convinced by the young Baronet's eloquent professions of sincerity, and eventually he wrung from her a bashful yes, and half an hour later took his departure.

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A month afterwards Sir George Murgatroyd and Elizabeth Jane Gunham (professionally known as Daisy Delamere) were quietly united in the bonds of holy matrimony in the presence of a male and female friend of the bride's only.

It was to be kept very quiet at first, and gradually to be allowed to leak out, and after the ceremony the happy pair departed for Paris.

Long before they returned the marriage was known. A society paper was the first to get the news, and

came out with the announcement that another lady music-hall singer had captured a title, and the *Entr'acte* published a full-length picture of Lady Murgatroyd with just one little line beneath it, and the line was: 'Then you jerk the other elbow.'

When Sir George returned to town he found the news had preceded him everywhere, but he didn't care. He said Daisy was a real good sort, and he wasn't going to let her go on singing like some fellows let their wives, but they were going back to his place in Yorkshire to settle down.

But before they returned to Yorkshire to settle down, one evening Sir George met Colonel Blab.

'Halloh!' said Blab, 'so you've done it, have you?'

'What's it to do with you, sir, what I have done?' exclaimed Sir George indignantly.

'Oh, nothing!' replied Blab; 'ask Bob Ballantine, he knows more about it than I do. Oh, you young fool!'

Before Sir George could resent this fresh insult Colonel Blab had jumped into a hansom, and was gone.

The next day, walking down Regent Street, Sir

George met Bob Ballantine. He went up to him and held out his hand.

‘Bob, old fellow,’ he said, ‘I don’t suppose we shall see much more of each other, so we’ll part-friends if you like, and let bygones be bygones.’

‘Oh, certainly, Murgy, if you wish it.’ Bob, who never was a proud man, took the proffered hand. ‘How’s Lady Murgatroyd?’

‘Oh, she’s very well, thank you.’

‘And how’s the boy?’

‘Boy! What boy? What do you mean?’

‘Oh, I beg pardon, I’m sure. I didn’t know she hadn’t told you.’

‘Told me what, man? Good heavens! what are you talking about?’

‘I’ve put my foot in it, evidently. Of course, I thought you knew that she’d been married before, and that her husband was old Blab’s chucker-out at the Camelia. That’s how she got to know old Blab so well. He got her in the music-halls.’

‘Good heavens! Do you mean to say I married the widow of the chucker-out of the Camelia?’ groaned the young Baronet.

‘No, not the widow exactly; she got a divorce



from him. Oh, it's all fair and square; but there was a boy. I suppose she's kept that as a sort of pleasant surprise for you later on. Oh, Murgy, Murgy, I always told you you were a young fool, but there's my hand again. I bear you no ill-will.'

When Sir George got home there was a stormy scene. Lady Murgatroyd confessed to the chucker-out, and she acknowledged the boy, and she hoped her husband would look over both.

He did. But they preyed on his mind for some time.

'She's a good little woman,' he said, 'and I can't help being fond of her. But I wish I had known before. Colonel Blab and Bob Ballantine will chuckle so confoundedly, and tell everybody that they always said I was "a young fool."' '

## A STORY OF SOHO

MADAME D'ARGIVAL was the dearest old lady in the world. She was a little old lady, and well-preserved, and moved about nimbly still, although she was past sixty, and she could read without glasses.

Everybody in Soho knew Madame D'Argival and her husband, Monsieur D'Argival. They had lived in the same house in the same street for forty years. Monsieur D'Argival had lived there even longer than that, for it had been his father's house, and his father had died there ; and it was from that house that Monsieur D'Argival, then a handsome young man of thirty, set out one fine day for Boulogne, and returned in a few weeks, bringing with him his young bride—his cousin Marie, to whom he had been betrothed almost since they were children.

They were a happy young couple then, and they were a happy old couple now. They had had every-

thing to make them happy. Monsieur D'Argival followed his father's profession—he taught the violin. His father had a splendid connection, and his son inherited it. The pupils even preferred the son to the father. In the first place, he was cleverer, then he was more patient, and he was ever so much more agreeable. All the young ladies who took lessons of Monsieur D'Argival, *filis*, declared that he was 'a dear,' and when they were introduced to the young wife they unanimously pronounced her to be 'sweet.'

The husband and wife retained their charming characters through life, and when they finally gave up business, having amassed a nice little fortune, which would enable them to live comfortably for the rest of their days, Monsieur D'Argival was 'a dear old gentleman,' and Madame D'Argival was 'a sweet old lady.'

Fortune had smiled upon them in the profession (the wife was an excellent musician, and took pupils as well as her husband), their pupils had turned out well, and the little concerts they gave occasionally had always been well patronized and profitable.

And then, you see, they had never been extravagant. They found their happiness in their home and in each

other's society, and when, after fifteen years of married life, a child was at last born to them, their happiness was complete.

They lived not only for each other now, but for their boy, the little Claude. They toiled for him, they saved for him, they worshipped him.

Never was there a boy born into the world so beautiful as their boy, so loving as their boy, so good as their boy; and some day, when they were old and the time came to go hence and be no more seen, Claude would have everything.

So they lived on in the little home in Soho, living the simple life of a French bourgeois couple. Every morning Madame D'Argival might be seen with her *bonne*, the excellent Lise, going from shop to shop and doing the daily marketing, and all the neighbours had a cheery 'Bonjour' and a smile for Madame D'Argival.

And when little Claude was old enough, he joined the little party, and that was always his morning promenade. Holding his mother's hand, the little fellow trotted gaily by her side, while Lise, carrying the basket, walked respectfully behind.

By-and-by, when the boy grew older, Monsieur

D'Argival suggested that he should be sent to a good English school, and that afterwards he should go to a college in France, but Madame D'Argival would not hear of it.

She could not bear to be parted from her boy, and her husband, who yielded to her in all things, yielded to her in that. He had a governess at home, and then a master at home, and so it came about that he never left his mother's side.

Some of the French boys in the neighbourhood chaffed him a little as he grew older. They said that he was tied to his mother's apron-strings, and as he was a shy boy and hated ridicule, he made few friends, and failed to pick up even that knowledge of the world which a boy can gather from his play-mates.

There were others besides the little French boys who thought that Claude was likely to become a molly-coddle if he was kept too much at home.

Every Sunday evening Monsieur and Madame D'Argival had a few friends to dinner. There was M. Courtin, the French grocer, from Old Compton Street; M. Hogard, the French bookseller, from Leicester Square; M. Garnier, the violinist, who for

twenty years had always been in the orchestra at the Italian Opera ; and Madame David, who had made a fortune in the little French hotel at the bottom of the street in which the D'Argivals lived, and retired to Bayswater. There were other ladies and gentlemen occasionally, but those were the main guests on Sunday evenings, and the 'oldest friends of the family.'

M. Hogard had been Claude's godfather, and Madame David his godmother, and so it was no presumption on their part occasionally to offer the parents advice concerning him.

'Claude is getting a big boy,' said M. Hogard. 'It is high time he went a little away from home. What do you say, Madame David?'

'I agree with you,' said Madame David. 'It is not good for boys to be always with their mother. They should learn something of the world that is outside their home.'

When these conversations occurred, Monsieur D'Argival would look across at his wife and say :

'You hear what our friends say, my dear. Are they not right?'

But Madame D'Argival would look sad, and say

that it would break her heart to part with the boy. And, besides, the world was so wicked. Boys learnt so much that was evil away from home; and then the tears would come in her eyes, and she would plead that at least he should not be sent away for a little while longer—not till he was older and stronger, and more able to take care of himself.

The conversation was resumed many times as the years went on, but always with the same result. The mother had always some excuse, and she always won the day. Monsieur Claude grew up such a bright, clever young fellow that at last the opposition was silenced. There was no need for him to go away, for he had completed his education at home, and he was now a young man.

When the question of leaving home and the watchful eye of his mother was raised anew, it was from quite an unexpected quarter.

It was Claude himself who made the suggestion. His education was complete; his parents had given up teaching, and were living on the interest of their savings. He thought that it was time he did something for himself. He wasn't musical, so he couldn't teach; but he was a fine linguist, and was excessively

clever at figures. A position had been offered him—a good position—and he thought he ought not to refuse it.

Madame D'Argival was horrified. She was about to protest, but M. Hogard was present (it was at one of the little Sunday dinner-parties that the conversation took place), and broke in.

'The boy is right,' he exclaimed; 'and I will be frank with you, my dear old friends. It is I who am to blame for putting this idea into Claude's head.'

'You !' exclaimed Monsieur D'Argival.

'Yes. You see, I am interested in a big concern which is being started in Paris. It will be a splendid thing, I am sure. We have to appoint a secretary. I was asked if I knew of a young man of good position who spoke French and English thoroughly, and I at once thought of my godson. I sent for Claude; we had a little talk. He would like to take the post. It is a fine opening for him, I can tell you, and I think if you don't let him go you will be standing in his light. He is two-and-twenty, you know, and you can't expect him to live always at home much longer.'

Madame D'Argival burst into tears. What was she



to do if her son went to Paris? Paris was so far away, and Paris was so wicked.

M. Hogard endeavoured to reassure the good mother. Paris wasn't exactly a Garden of Eden; but was London? One capital was as wicked as the other; and, after all, what did it matter? Claude wasn't a wicked young fellow. He was no more likely to fall into temptation or kick over the traces in Paris than in London.

M. D'Argival supported his friend. Madame David, alas! could not be invited to give her opinion. She had been dead these two years.

Madame D'Argival asked for the night to think about it; and thinking about it, she was still wide awake when the next morning came.

But she had brought herself to see that, after all, what M. Hogard said was true. Sooner or later Claude must leave the nest. She could not expect him, now that he was a grown-up man, to be always with her, and she had no right to stand in his way when there was a fine chance of his making a position in the world for himself.

And so at last, with tears which she vainly tried to hide in her loving eyes, she consented, and Claude

was duly introduced to the syndicate who were going to run their big affair in Paris, and was accepted as secretary.

The preliminaries were soon arranged. Claude was to have a nice salary to commence with, and a percentage on the business done.

There was just one little formality to be complied with. Large sums of money would pass through the young man's hands, and naturally the syndicate would require a guarantee—that is, someone would have to be security for him for the sum of 100,000 francs.

There was no difficulty about that; it was a mere matter of form. His father and M. Hogard would be security for the amount between them. That matter being duly arranged, Claude busied himself in preparations for his departure; and in the excitement of getting everything ready for her son Madame D'Argival almost forgot her grief.

At last the day when the first adieu was to be spoken arrived. It was the first time in their lives that mother and son had been separated for more than a few hours. Claude had determined to be

brave for his mother's sake ; but when they stood on the platform, and the guard came along and said, ' Now, sir, please ; we're going,' he broke down, and as he flung his arms around his mother's neck he cried like a child. The old lady broke down at that, you may be sure, and then Monsieur D'Argival began to cry too ; and the guard, who stood with the door open waiting for Claude to get into the carriage, was so moved by their grief that he told another guard afterwards that if it hadn't been that they were a minute behind time and the stationmaster's eye was on him, he should have had to shed a tear himself.

Claude put his head out of the window and waved his handkerchief as the train moved slowly out of the station ; then he sat back in the carriage and wiped his eyes, and thought his heart would break. But by the time he got to Dover the excitement of this great and marvellous change in his life had begun to banish all other thoughts, and when he landed at Calais he had forgotten the past and was dreaming dreams of the future.

But the poor old couple went home sorrowfully together, and that night it seemed to them that a

great darkness had fallen on their home, and the light had faded out of their lives for ever.

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Two years went by, and during that two years Claude came home twice. The D'Argivals had lived long enough in England to acquire a few English customs, and they had come to look upon Christmas as their English neighbours did, and to treat it as the festival of home. It was Christmas-time that Claude chose for his home-coming. His letters were always very affectionate and very hopeful. The concern was going well—not so well as had been hoped, but, still, money was being made. The working showed a small profit, and the syndicate believed that with time complete success would result. They were satisfied with Claude, and were convinced that he was clever, and that the disappointment was not due to him.

The first time that Claude returned his mother's quick eye detected many changes in him. He looked older, more thoughtful and serious, and there was a worried look in his eyes that shocked her.

He explained that the cares and anxieties of the house were very great, and M. Hogard bore him out, and his mother had to be satisfied.

The second time that he came over he had grown careworn, and his father was alarmed. He looked perfectly ill. But the mother was spared the pain of seeing the alteration in her son's face. The first great grief of their life had been the parting with their son; the second great grief had now come upon them. Madame D'Argival had complained for some time of her sight. She had at last consulted an oculist, and he had told her the truth: there was a danger of her going blind. The oculist told the old lady that there was danger—he told her husband that there was a certainty; it was but a question of time.

Poor old M. D'Argival was broken-hearted when he knew the worst, and he cried out against the cruel fate which threatened to darken the world to his dear old wife in her last years. He lived to see the wonderful hand of God even in this terrible affliction.

When Claude D'Argival came home for the second Christmas his mother could scarcely see him; her sight was fading fast. But, like the brave old lady that she was, she would not let her affliction make others unhappy. She was bright and cheerful as ever, and, holding her dear son's hand in hers when

they were alone, she told him that she forgot all else in her gratitude for his love and in her pride at his success.

Old Monsieur D'Argival, however, was very much upset by Claude's haggard and careworn look. He asked his son anxiously if there were any troubles on his mind. Claude answered him that there were not, and attributed his appearance to overwork and the responsibility of the big business in Paris, which made such slow headway.

'I think the worst is over now,' he said, trying to reassure his father. 'The prospect is brighter than it has ever been, and if things only mend a little there'll be no more talk of winding the affair up.'

'Winding it up!' exclaimed his father. 'Has it come to that?'

'Well, the directors have been talking about it. They don't take such a hopeful view of matters as I do, and this year there is likely to be a big opposition to us—an opposition with more capital. The directors say it will be better to wind up now and save the capital.'

This was a revelation to the old man, and explained to him his son's anxiety.

‘Never mind, Claude,’ he said; ‘if you lose this situation, you can always come home, my boy. Thank God, there is enough for us all.’

Claude gripped his father’s hand silently, and no more was said on the subject. In two days he bade his parents farewell, and went back to Paris.

And now the truth must be told. Claude had not told it to his father, and not even the directors suspected it.

Brought up in a home atmosphere, rarely away from his mother, the young man had not had proper training to enable him successfully to encounter the temptations of life.

In Paris he was his own master, and he was thrown on his own resources. It was all a new world to him, and he did as hundreds of young men in a similar situation have done—he became the easy prey of the first fair temptress who crossed his path.

He fell madly in love with a beautiful adventuress well known in the Paris Half-world—a girl who had been in the chorus of an Opera Bouffe theatre, and who, when Claude met her, was the mistress of an old stockbroker.

Claude was a handsome young fellow, and Anas-

tasia La Doux, generally known as La Belle Bordelaise, was rather proud of her conquest. She fooled the young man to the top of his bent, and soon had him at her mercy. Her protector soon after falling a victim to over-speculation, Anastasia found herself free from encumbrance, and listened readily to Claude's proposition that she should allow him to come to the rescue and present her with a new home.

It was the old story—the young man fell completely into the power of the siren, and her word became his law. To gratify her extravagant habits he sacrificed everything but honour, and at last, when it became a question of her leaving him unless he found means to surround her with greater luxuries, he sacrificed honour too. He made use of money which was at his command—the money belonging to his employers. He began by embezzling a small sum, and then went on until he was involved to the extent of many hundreds of pounds, and had to resort to various artifices in order to conceal his delinquencies.

At last the crash came. The syndicate determined to wind up the business, and then discovery was inevitable. It came sooner than Claude had antici-



pated ; and while he was at his mistress's apartments one evening vainly endeavouring to persuade her to fly with him to Spain, a police agent entered and informed him that he was in custody on a charge of embezzlement.

When M. Hogard heard the news his first thought was for the old father and mother.

'It will kill them !' he cried ; 'it will kill them ! The boy of whom they were so proud—a thief ! Their boy in prison ! Oh, it is too terrible !'

The news had to be broken to the father by someone, for he was a guarantor, and the company would come down on him sooner or later for his share.

'Better the news should be broken by a friend,' said M. Hogard, and off he went on his sorrowful errand.

Grasping his old friend's hand and begging him to have courage, the kind old grocer stammered out his tale.

At first M. D'Argival stared at him blankly. He couldn't understand what was meant. But gradually he realized the truth, and then it seemed to him that the world had come to an end.

‘My Claude!’ he sobbed; ‘my poor boy—in prison! Ah! let me go to him.’

M. Hogard shook his head sorrowfully.

‘No, no, old friend,’ he said, ‘you can do no good over there. Your place is here. You must stay and comfort your wife.’

‘Yes,’ exclaimed M. D’Argival, starting up, ‘you are right. She needs me more than ever now. But she must never know—she must never know!’

And she never did.

M. D’Argival paid the guarantee. He paid the whole amount for which he was liable, insisting that Claude was his son, and he could not allow his old friend to lose by his family. Certainly it was his place to pay the guarantee. M. Hogard protested, but when he called to protest the money had been paid, and M. D’Argival refused to receive one farthing back again. He could not give the company back the whole of the money Claude had embezzled; it was not in his power to do so. To live and to support his wife he would have to give lessons again—to look up his old pupils and get new ones. He knew it would be a hard task, for he was old and feeble now,

and almost past his work. But he could do something—he could earn a little.

Claude was tried and convicted; but a powerful plea for mercy was made on his behalf, and he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment only. Then began the terrible task of deceiving the old blind mother. She inquired perpetually about her boy. What did he write? how was he getting on? Then M. D'Argival and M. Hogard between them made up letters, which M. D'Argival read aloud to his wife—cheery, comforting letters, saying that all was well, and that Claude hoped to come home again next Christmas.

Christmas came, and then an excuse had to be invented. The mother had looked forward to it so anxiously—she was always talking of it. Claude would be home again—she would be able to take his dear face in her hands and press her kiss upon his lips. Every hopeful word she spoke was as the stab of a sharp knife in the heart of her husband.

He let her go on hoping until Christmas Eve, then he read her a letter from Claude. The boy hoped his mother would bear up, but he had just received good news. He had received a splendid appointment in

Algiers; far better than the one he had in the company, but he had to start for his post at once, and so he would have to send his mother a loving message, and beg her to let the knowledge of his good fortune soften the blow of not seeing him this Christmas time. He would be sure to come next Christmas, and perhaps before. For the sake of her boy the mother bore her sorrow and was brave.

The two years went by, and the two old men continued their pious fraud. The blindness of the mother prevented her seeing many changes about her—only now and then she detected the sadness in her husband's voice. He told her that he was grieving because she was blind and Claude was far away, and then she forgot her own trouble and tried to comfort him.

And at last Claude was free. It was Christmas time, and he was coming home. He was to be liberated just before Christmas Day.

'He is coming,' cried the old father joyfully to his wife. 'Ah, my darling, all your patient waiting is rewarded. Your boy is coming home again.'

He was to arrive on Christmas Eve.

Monsieur and Madame D'Argival sat up till mid-

night, and M. Hogard stayed with them to welcome the boy. He did not come.

‘He will come to-morrow,’ they said ; ‘he has been unable to start till the night-mail.’

Christmas Day came, and still no Claude. Christmas Day passed.

‘He will come to-morrow,’ said his father, and Madame D’Argival went upstairs to bed, and her sightless eyes were wet with tears all night.

M. Hogard thought there must be something wrong. He started for Paris, and went to the authorities. Claude had been released.

M. Hogard said : ‘Yes, but he has not returned home. His old father and mother have expected him for three days.’

The Commissioner of Police shrugged his shoulders.

‘Poor people!’ he said. ‘I am sorry for them. They have a worthless son. Claude D’Argival on his release started for Brussels—his mistress, Anastasia Le Doux, is there ; he has gone to join her.’

M. Hogard went back with a heavy heart. What could he say—what could he do—how could he let the dreadful truth be known to those two fond, breaking hearts at home?

When he got back there was no need to lie to the poor old blind mother any more. She had died quietly in the night. In the early hours her husband had been awakened. She was holding out her arms.

‘Ah, Claude, my Claude!’ she cried, ‘you have come at last. Thank God! thank God!’

Then she sank back upon her pillow and ceased to breathe. God in His mercy had given her supreme happiness in the hour of her death. She believed she had seen her son and she never knew the truth.

Old D’Argival died not very long afterwards. Claude D’Argival lived with his mistress for a few weeks, and then she turned him out. When I last heard of him he had sunk to the lowest depths. He was assisting Anastasia to blackmail her admirers, and she was keeping him.

## THE PRIEST'S SECRET

It was long past midnight, but still Dr. Hanson and the Rev. John Wannop sat by the fire in the beautiful oak library at Studley Court. The doctor was a broad - shouldered, healthy looking Yorkshireman, whose age you would have given at forty, but who was really on the wrong side of fifty. The clergyman was many years his junior, a tall, thin young man, with rounded shoulders and an awkward, nervous style about him. You looked at the Rev. John Wannop's body, and you thought him a very ordinary person ; you looked up at his face, and instantly you were fascinated. It was almost a perfect face, and the dark, dreamy eyes were made all the more beautiful by the pallor of the delicate skin. Young ladies who saw him for the first time raved about him. His dark eyes and black hair made him quite a hero. Some of them described his

beauty as 'Byronic'; others declared that he looked like a Greek god. No one in Studley had ever seen Lord Byron, or looked upon a Greek god in the flesh. The Rev. Mr. Wannop's female admirers simply used the comparison that came handiest to them.

The male population of Studley were not quite so enthusiastic. They liked the Rev. John, but they thought there was something uncanny about him. When he first came among them—a young curate of six-and-twenty—to do the whole of the work for a wealthy vicar, who spent the best part of the year travelling about 'for the benefit of his health,' they thought he was disappointed in love, or suffered from some internal complaint. And as time went on, and they saw more of him, and listened to his sermons, those of them who troubled about him at all made up their minds that he had 'done something'—that he was a young man 'with a past.' His appointment to the curacy was understood to be due to the influence of Mr. Arkwright, the new owner of Studley Court. The curate and Mr. Arkwright arrived in Studley almost on the same day, and it was understood the greatest intimacy existed between them.



Mr. Arkwright was a wealthy merchant, who had retired from business after amassing a large fortune. He came to Studley Court with his wife and a large retinue of servants, with carriages and horses, and every outward and visible sign of wealth. For twelve months previously an army of workmen had had possession of the old Court, which had been tenantless for years, and everybody who saw the magnificent improvements felt convinced that it had passed into the hands of a millionaire. There was considerable anxiety to see Mr. Arkwright when he arrived, but it must be confessed that Studley was a little disappointed in him. There was nothing grand about him. He was a quiet, benevolent-looking old gentleman, with kind blue eyes and beautiful iron-gray hair, and his wife was as simple and unpretending as himself. But that he was immensely wealthy there could be no doubt. His hospitality at Studley was noble; he was a lavish patron of all the local charities, and he soon became the good genius of the district, and a man of importance in the country. Everybody liked him and adored his wife. A more unassuming couple it would have been impossible to find. They were always accessible to their poorer

neighbours, and the amount of good which they did, in a quiet, unostentatious way, was incalculable.

On great occasions—such as Studley Races, the Agricultural Show, and the Yeomanry Drill—Studley Court was an open house, and filled with visitors from town. But, as a rule, the Arkwrights lived their life very quietly, and confined their hospitality to a few local friends, whose acquaintance they had made since their arrival at the Court.

The Rev. John Wannop was a constant visitor. On fine afternoons it was generally leaning on the curate's arm that Mr. Arkwright walked about his grounds, and when the Arkwrights drove into Studley town the Rev. Mr. Wannop very frequently occupied the back seat in the carriage. Of late Dr. Hanson had been a frequent visitor as well. Mr. Arkwright had not been very well. He was troubled with a return of a malady which he had contracted, it was understood, in his early manhood in California. Latterly the doctor had been in daily attendance, and very soon it was known that Mr. Arkwright was seriously and dangerously ill. It was a fever of some kind, it was said, and the poor old gentleman had become delirious—so delirious that it was necessary

for someone to be always with him, and the doctor, the curate, and Mrs. Arkwright, the devoted wife, had been relieving each other day and night by the sick man's bedside.

Dr. Jones, Dr. Hanson's professional rival in Studley, shook his head when he heard the details of the illness.

'I can't make it out,' he said; 'if all I hear be true, they ought to have a professional nurse; a man in that condition is likely to do himself or others an injury at any time. It can't be a question of expense, and yet there are these two men and the wife wearing themselves out and undertaking duties for which they are unfitted, rather than have proper attendance. It's odd—very odd. I'm afraid Hanson doesn't appreciate the gravity of the case.'

But Dr. Hanson did appreciate the gravity of the case, and that is why he and the curate are sitting together to-night in the great library at Studley Court.

'I don't know what to do for the best,' said the doctor, after he had gazed long and anxiously into the fire as if for inspiration. 'Mrs. Arkwright can't go on much longer. At any moment some new case of

illness may call me away, and you must attend to your duties.'

'I can give my nights,' replied the curate.

'Yes, my dear fellow, that's all very well; but if you watch by our poor friend's bedside in the night, and work all day, you'll soon be worn out.'

'We can't call anyone else in. You know it's impossible!'

'We might get a nurse who could be trusted. Nurses do have to hear a good deal; and, after all, the secrets of the sick-room are sacred.'

'Some secrets—yes; but not a secret like this. Sooner than let a stranger hear what that poor fellow says in his delirium, I would give up everything and remain by his side. And if we yielded, you know, Dr. Hanson, his wife would never consent.'

'No, poor lady. My God! what a terrible revelation it must have been to her! how bravely she has borne it!'

'Bravely! Yes,' said the curate, rising and pacing the room; 'it's marvellous! Do you know, Hanson, that when I first became the possessor of the secret of John Arkwright's life I thought it would have killed me.'

‘Killed you—why?’

‘You don’t understand what it has been to me. I loved this man—I venerated him. It was he who took me by the hand when I was left motherless and fatherless and penniless; it was he who educated me and brought me up, and gave me my chance in life. I felt to him as a son to a loving father; and when I learned that he was a——’

‘Hush!’ exclaimed the doctor, glancing towards the door.

He rose and opened it, looked out cautiously, and listened for a moment.

‘I thought I heard someone moving about,’ he said, as he came back and sat down by the fire.

There was a moment’s silence, and then the doctor continued the interrupted conversation.

‘I can quite sympathize with you, my dear fellow,’ he said; ‘it must have been a terrible blow. I don’t think I ever heard such a ghastly story in my life.’

‘You agree with me that it is absolutely necessary to keep silence on the subject? You consider that I have done right in holding my peace all these years?’

‘Most certainly. I can quite understand that, as

a clergyman, you may at first have had some scruples as to your duty ; but, looking at all the circumstances, I think you are fully justified.'

'And you, now that you also know the truth, will keep silence too?'

'Absolutely. If the circumstances under which the story reached me—from the mouth of a delirious patient—did not justify me, I should only have to think of that brave, devoted wife upstairs, and that would decide me. Besides, even presuming that the poor fellow were alone in the world, what good would come of betraying him now?'

'None—none,' replied the curate, the tears coming into his eyes. 'But I sometimes wish that he himself had had the moral courage to confess the truth—to tell his horrible story, and risk everything.'

'It would have done no good,' said the doctor. 'It would have ruined a life of great usefulness, and I doubt if ever he could have been put on his trial for the crime. He couldn't have been tried here, because this country has nothing to do with the matter, and it would have been an absurdity for him to go back to America and give himself up there. Had he done so, I doubt if anything would have been

done. He might not have been believed. It might even charitably have been considered a hallucination on his part.'

'Yes—yes; he said that himself when we talked the matter over.'

'How did he come to tell you?' said the doctor.

'We were travelling abroad together. It was the year before he met that lady who is now his wife. I was only twenty then, and, as I have told you, he treated me as a son. He was taken seriously ill in Rome, and had a touch of the fever. One night he became a little lightheaded, and talked about his old life, and some words he made use of startled me. The next day he was calmer, and gradually got quite well again. When he was able to get about I told him what strange things he had said in his delirium. He started, and seemed terribly upset, but made no reply. Late that evening he came to my room and said he had something to tell me. He said that all his life he had wanted somebody to confide his secret to—someone who would understand him and sympathize with him; and then he told me all.'

'It must have been a terrible shock to you.'

'Yes; but I hardly recognised all that it meant

then. I suffered more afterwards—I suffer more now. I loved this man—my benefactor, my almost father—then, and I love him more now; yet not once, but a hundred times, have I felt that the burthen he had imposed upon me was greater than I could bear—that I must go out into the world and cry it aloud. I have felt that I was sharing his guilt—that I was aiding him to deceive and defraud the world in which he was honoured and respected. Dr. Hanson, answer me this as man to man. You have, during the short time he has been in the place, seen him honoured and respected, looked up to, almost revered. Do you believe, if it had been known that he had taken the life of his wife and child, that one living soul would have taken his hand in friendship?’

The doctor hesitated.

‘Let us look at the matter calmly,’ he said. ‘You know it, I know it, and the wife who sits upstairs by his bedside knows it now, and we are still his friends; we pity him, and you, too, love him still.’

‘Yes, that is true; but it is not a fair answer to my question,’ said the curate sadly. ‘The knowledge has come to us as a sacred trust.’



‘His wife does not shrink from him.’

‘No; but from this hour I believe she will be a broken-hearted woman. Life can never be the same to her again. Do you believe that she, a good, pure, true, loving woman, would have married him had he come to her and said: “I am a murderer. I killed my first wife—I killed my child; but I love you. Will you be my wife?”’

‘Well, honestly, I don’t suppose she would; although the circumstances——’

‘The circumstances cannot alter the facts. For all the life-long sorrow that this poor lady must suffer now, I blame myself. I should have spoken out. I should have insisted on his telling her the truth before he married her. I hesitated through my great love for him, and ever since I have felt that I shared his guilt.’

‘Come, come, my dear fellow!’ exclaimed the doctor kindly. ‘You are a little too hard on yourself. The whole business is very terrible, I grant you. I myself was inexpressibly shocked when I discovered the truth; but, as a man of the world, I believe you have done nothing of which you need be ashamed.’

‘Ay, as a man of the world; but I am a priest of God!’

‘It is the duty of every priest of God to help the suffering, mourn with them that mourn, to console the wretched, to show the sinner his way to salvation; but surely it is not the duty of a priest of God to betray his friend and benefactor—to give up to shame and degradation a man he honestly believes to have been the victim of a moment of madness. Come; I have only heard the rough outline of this terrible story. Tell me the whole truth—tell me the circumstances as they were told to you—and let us see if you are really justified in torturing yourself in this manner.’

‘Yes,’ replied the curate, ‘I will; and if you can say when I have finished that no blame attaches to me, it will be at least some comfort. Would to God I could persuade *myself* that I am innocent!’

‘One moment,’ said the doctor; ‘let me just go upstairs and see how Arkwright is. He was asleep when I left him. I will just tell his wife that we are sitting up, and at a word from her one of us will relieve her.’

The doctor was absent for about ten minutes.

‘He is still sleeping,’ he said. ‘To-morrow we shall probably know the best—or the worst. I think everything will depend upon how he wakes after this long sleep. Now, tell me the whole story.’

‘I will tell it to you,’ said the curate, with a deep sigh, ‘as nearly as I can in John Arkwright’s own words. I remember them—they are seared on my memory, and I shall carry them to the grave.’

‘He told me that when he was a very young man, barely thirty, he left England. He had neither father nor mother, and his uncle, with whom he lived, was a hard, miserly man, who treated him badly. Anxious to get rid of him at any price, he obtained for the young man a situation in an office in New York.

‘John Arkwright remained in New York for two years, doing very little to improve his position, and just earning enough to pay for his food and lodging.

‘Then he made a move, and managed to get to San Francisco, where, after undergoing great vicissitudes, he obtained employment in a drinking and gambling saloon kept by a notorious ex-prize-fighter.

‘While there he fell in love with a young girl,

whose father had been killed in a drunken row in this "hell" one night. The father's friends and associates got up a subscription, and handed it to the girl, who was a hardworking, decent lass, and had done all she could to keep her father straight after her mother's death. While the funds were being raised John saw a great deal of her. He pitied her and sympathized with her—for her lot was a very cruel one—and by a natural process fell in love with her. They were both alone in the world, they were both unhappy, and what was more natural than that they should come together and at last make a match of it?

'One thing they were both agreed upon, and that was to get away from their present miserable surroundings, to leave San Francisco, and start a new life together far away.

'So it came about that soon after they were married John and his wife set out with a band of adventurers for a wild spot where, it was stated, fortunes were to be made. Thousands of men and women went on the same errand in those days, and, though many failed utterly and died miserably, some became the pioneers of a great movement. On the lonely spots where they settled, made a clearing, and built their

wooden huts, mighty cities stand to-day, to bear witness to their courage and their enterprise.

‘ John Arkwright and his wife were among the unfortunate ones who failed. They found themselves, after years of hardship and misery, part of a band of men and women settled in a lonely spot, cut off from civilization, and surrounded by a lawless band of half-starved adventurers.

‘ John and his wife starved with the rest, and to add to their misery they had now a little child—a poor sickly little thing, whose sufferings only added to their own misery.

‘ Hard as their lot was, it gradually grew harder still. The wife fell ill of a kind of wasting fever, and the child moaned in ceaseless pain. Then John fell ill and could do no work at all, and starvation stared them in the face.

‘ Some of the men and women, rough creatures, hardened to fate by a ceaseless struggle for existence, helped them a little ; but times were bad all round, and it soon became a case of each for himself and his own. To add to the general misery and terror, a gang of thieves and murderers had been at work in the neighbourhood. In a camp some miles away the

women had been murdered and a lot of cattle stolen and driven off. These men were mad, drunken desperadoes, ruffians who would murder a whole family for the sake of their little money or the few valuables that might be about the place.

‘It was notorious that many of the settlers in these lonely places, though to all appearances poor, had money hoarded away—money they scraped together in order to get back to civilization, or in some instances to buy claims further afield. The gang, which was at the time I speak of the terror of the small camps, had been encouraged by finding a quantity of gold in one or two shanties, and this had led them to continue their depredations.

‘One night John Arkwright woke up with a strange pain in his head. He told me that it was as if he had suddenly gone mad. He woke up with the idea that he was going to die—that the fever would kill him. He looked round him, and saw his wife asleep by his side, her baby in her arms. She was terribly ill and weak, and her face was white and pinched.

‘Suddenly the terrible idea came to the frenzied man that he was going to die and leave these two helpless creatures at the mercy of the world. He

was mad at the moment—I am sure of it—the delirium of the fever was upon him.

“‘It shall not be,’ he said to himself. ‘There is nothing but misery and starvation before them. I cannot die and leave them to suffer alone—we will die together.’”

‘Then, in his madness, he rose quietly, and went to the table and took a knife that lay there—a long sharp knife that he used at his work—and——’

The clergyman paused for a moment.

‘Oh, it is too horrible!’ he said; ‘you know; you have heard from his own lips. You have heard him rave in his delirium now what he did that awful night. He killed them—killed them as they slept, and took the knife and turned to lift it to his own throat; and just as he felt the cold edge touch his flesh the strength that frenzy had given him suddenly left him, and he fell down and knew no more. When he came to himself it was bright daylight. He had forgotten everything for the moment; all was vague and dim, and a great mist was before his eyes and a great buzzing in his ears. Gradually he became aware that there was a noise in the next room. He heard the sound of trampling feet, and

voices, and presently a couple of men rushed into the room.

“By —— they’ve murdered ’em!” cried a man, and instantly a crowd of men were round the bodies.

“No!” exclaimed another rough voice, “they’re not all dead—the woman and the child are; but the man’s alive, they didn’t finish him.”

John felt himself gently raised up, and saw a great ring of faces round him. He recognised some of them—they were his camp mates.

“Don’t tell him anything about it yet, poor chap!” said one man kindly; “let’s get him away. Here, bring him to my place, and see what we can do for him. He’ll know what’s happened soon enough, God help him!”

They carried John Arkwright gently away; they attended to his wound, which was only a slight one, and gradually their rough skill brought him to the point at which his life was safe. And then, before he could tell his story, they told him theirs. During the night the gang of robbers had been in the camp; they had murdered a poor fellow about a quarter of a mile away, and robbed the place, and then they had



gone on and broken into John's place. John stared in astonishment.

“Ah, you didn't see 'em, I suppose,” said his informant; “they must have done their work quietly, while you were asleep. They must have been frightened or disturbed before they finished you, old chap; but, God help you, they've killed your wife and child.”

“They broke into my place?” said John, half in a dream.

“Yes; the place is upside down. They turned over everything to see if you'd got any money. We shot two of the brutes dead this morning in the open, but the rest got clear away.”

That was all John heard, for he was faint and weak—the excitement had been too much for him, and he swooned away. When gradually he recovered and his strength slowly returned, he hesitated to tell these wild, lawless men the truth. They might not even believe him. He almost tried to persuade himself that he had been the victim of a delusion. The circumstantial evidence was all in his favour. There was no doubt these men had ransacked the outer room of his dwelling.

‘ On one of the bodies of the men who had been pursued and shot had been found property taken from his home—it was of no value, but it was known to be his—an implement of his trade with his name carved on the wooden handle.

‘ The men must have broken in and searched his place, and have taken alarm at some sound before they had time to enter the second room and see the two bodies that lay there.

‘ The whole settlement believed that John Arkwright’s wife and child had been brutally murdered by the robbers, and that John owed his escape to their having left him before they had completed their barbarous work.

‘ For months afterwards he suffered the most terrible mental torture, but his fortunes underwent a change. A stranger arrived in the settlement for a time—a man with a certain amount of capital—he took a fancy to John and invited him to go with him to a big city. John Arkwright was glad to leave a place haunted by such terrible memories, and accepted the offer.

‘ The two men became partners in the city ; their enterprise succeeded, and they made a fortune with

the rapidity common enough years ago in the United States.

‘Then they separated, and John speculated on his own account, and at last came back to England at the age of fifty, a man of wealth and position.

‘It was in London that he met me and our friendship commenced,’ said the curate, after a pause. ‘He was my benefactor and protector, and you know the rest. He had me educated for the Church, since that was my aim, and it was just before I took holy orders that he told me, under the circumstances I have narrated to you, his ghastly secret. Then he met the lady who is now his second wife, and until this week I have been the only living man who knew the story of his past. You have discovered it as his poor wife has discovered it—listening to the ravings of a delirious man; and now——’

The doctor looked up from the brown study in which he had fallen.

‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘how much does his wife know?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘She has heard his terrible confession, but she cannot know any details—unless you have told her.’

‘I have told her nothing. I only know she heard him denounce himself as a murderer.’

‘Then,’ said the doctor, ‘my task is easier than I thought.’

‘Do you mean that——’

‘I mean that she really does not yet understand thoroughly what her husband has said. She knows that her husband accuses himself of a terrible crime—a murder. You told me when we came away from his bedside enough to convince me that he was speaking the truth, but I have all along tried to persuade her that it was the delirium which suggested the horrible charges he brings against himself.’

‘But she agrees that we three must watch him between us—that no stranger must come near him.’

‘Naturally; no wife would want strangers to go out of her house with such words as these ringing in her ears. *They might believe them!*’

The curate rose from his seat and paced the room.

‘Dr. Hanson,’ he said, ‘do you wish me to be party to a further deception? Do you wish me to lie to John Arkwright’s wife?’

‘No; I wish you to say nothing more. I command you to say nothing. Mrs. Arkwright’s health is in

my charge, and I warn you that you are to do nothing and say nothing which, at such a time of anxiety as this, might have terrible consequences. Do you understand ?

‘ I understand.’

‘ And you will obey ?’

‘ Yes ; for the present I will obey.’

‘ Then good-bye. You go home and get some rest. I will stay in the house all night, and relieve Mrs. Arkwright. Remember, until I—as the medical man in attendance here, responsible for the lives of my patients, for the shock of her husband’s crime has been a severe one to Mrs. Arkwright—give you leave to speak, you are to remain silent. Now good-night.’

They shook hands, and the Rev. John Wannop went out into the night. He went home, but he could not sleep. He sat till the dawn by the window of his room, looking out at the shadows, and crying out that he, a priest of God, was shielding the blood-guilty ; and when the dawn came he flung himself down on his knees and prayed to Heaven for light and guidance.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, after his duties were over, the curate went up to Studley Court. He met the doctor near the lodge-gates. The doctor took him by the arm.

‘Old friend,’ he said, ‘you will have a sacred mission in that house presently; how will you perform it?’

‘What do you mean?’ said the curate uneasily.

‘I mean that this morning early there was a great change in John Arkwright. He will not live till to-night.’

‘Is—he—is he conscious?’

‘Yes, and you can go to him—go to him and comfort him; and when he is gone it will be your duty to speak words of hope and comfort to the poor woman who loved him. You will have to decide what those words shall be. Will you, as a priest of God, raise her drooping heart and give her a message of hope? or will you, as a priest of God, tell her that the dead man she loved was what the world would call a murderer? That is what you have to decide. Good-bye till we meet again.’

John Wannop went sadly through the gates of Studley Court and up to the great house. The dying

man's wife took him gently by the hand, and led him to the bedside of her husband. Then she left them alone.

John Arkwright knew that he was dying. The delirium was over now, and he could speak calmly of the end. He put out his weak hand and drew the priest gently towards him.

'John,' he said, 'I am going far beyond the punishment or the forgiveness of man. Will you leave it to God to punish or forgive me? Will you promise me that my secret shall die with me, that the woman who has given me her love shall never know from you when I am gone what I was?'

The young clergyman bent his head.

'Why do you ask me that?' he said.

'Because, John, the doctor has told me that I have been wandering and talking, that I have said strange things, and that my wife has heard them. He has told her that they were nothing, that they are the terrible words which come sometimes to fevered brains. But he has also told me that he has guessed the truth, that you have confirmed his suspicions, and that you are hesitating even now as to whether you

shall assist him in—in deceiving my wife. John, I have loved you as my own son ; you can repay that love now. Let me die knowing that you will not say the words which would break a desolate woman's heart, and leave her to bear the bitterness of my guilt. Promise !'

The young priest's pale lips moved for a moment as if in prayer. Then, falling on his knees by the bedside, he took the dying man's hand in his and answered softly :

'I promise.'

\* \* \* \* \*

They buried the master of Studley Court in the little green cemetery out beyond the town, and the people came in crowds to the funeral to show their respect for the good man who had passed away.

The doctor and the curate left the churchyard together. Outside the gate their hands met, and they said no word, for their hearts were full. But that grip was a silent renewal of the promise the priest had given the dying man.

Buried in their hearts for ever is the secret they



will carry to their graves. They alone will ever know that the good man over whose grave there stands a marble memorial, on which are recorded his honourable life and his Christian virtues, was a murderer—the murderer of his wife and child.

THE END.

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[SEE OVER.

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God's

And that same prayer doth teach us all to  
render

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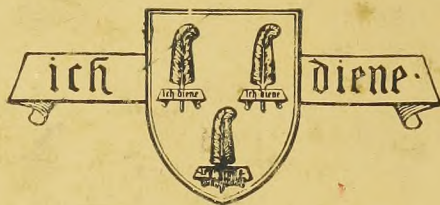


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